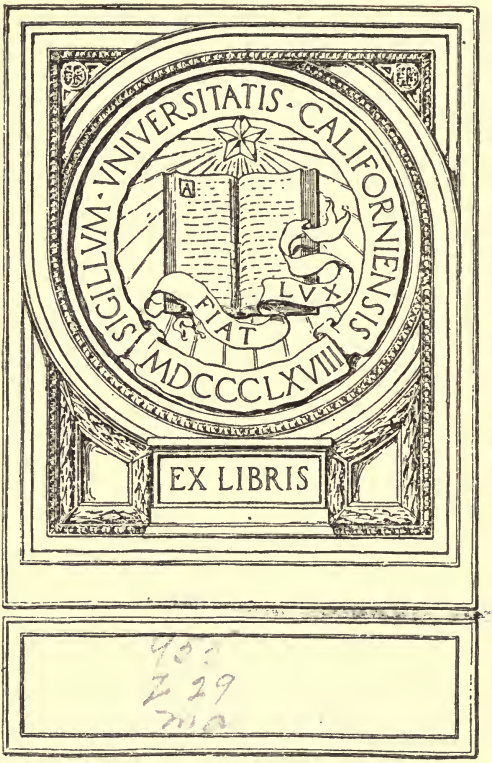
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"'THERE!' SAID OLIVE, PUFFING OUT A THIN CLOUD"

THE MASTER

A Novel

BY

I. ZANGWILL

AUTHOR OF "THE KING OF SCHNORRERS"
"CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
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THE MASTER

PROEM

Despite its long stretch of winter, in which May might wed December in no incompatible union, 'twas a happy soil, this Acadia, a country of good air and great spaces; two-thirds of the size of Scotland, with a population that could be packed away in a corner of Glasgow; a land of green forests and rosy cheeks; a land of milk and molasses; a land of little hills and great harbors, of rich valleys and lovely lakes, of overflowing rivers and oversurging tides that, with all their menace, did but fertilize the meadows with red silt and alluvial mud; a land over which France and England might well bicker when first they met oversea; a land which, if it never reached the restless energy of the States, never retained the Old World atmosphere that long lingered over New England villages; save here and there in some rare Acadian settlement that dreamed out its life in peace and prayer among its willow-trees and in the shadows of its orchards.

At Minudie, at Clare in Annapolis County, where the goodly apples grew, lay such fragments of old France, simple communities shutting out the world and time, marrying their own, tilling their good dyke land, and picking up the shad that the retreating tide left on the exposed flats; listening to the Angelus, and baring their heads as some Church procession passed through the drowsy streets. They had escaped the Great Expulsion, nor had joined in the exodus of "Evangeline," and,

sprinkled about the country, were compatriots of theirs who had drifted back when the times grew more sedate; but for the most part it was the Saxon that profited by the labors of the pioneer Gaul, repairing the tumble-down farms and the dilapidated dykes, possessing himself of embanked marsh lands, and replanting the plum-trees and the quinces his predecessor had naturalized. For the revolt of the States against Britain sent thousands of American loyalists flocking into this "New Scotland," which thus became a colony of "New England." Scots themselves flowed in from auld Scotland, and the German came to sink himself in the Briton, and a band of Irish adventurers, under the swashbuckling Colonel McNutt, arrived with a grant of a million acres that they were not destined to occupy. The Acadian repose had fled forever. The sparse Indian hastened to make himself scarcer, conscious there was no place for him in the new order, and disappearing deliciously in hogsheads of rum. The virgin greenwood rang with axes, startling the bear and the moose. Crash! Down went pine and beech, hemlock and maple, their stumps alone left to rot and enrich the fields. Crash!—thud! The weasel grew warier, the astonished musquash vanished in eddying circles. Bridges began to span the rivers where the beaver built its dams in happy unconsciousness of the tall cylinder that was about to crown civilization. The caribou and the silver fox pressed inland to save their skins. The snare was set in the wild-wood, and the crack of the musket followed the ring of the axe. The mackerel and the herring sought destruction in shoals, and the seines brimmed over with salmon and alewives and gaspereux. The wild land that had bloomed with golden-rod and violets was tamed with crops, and plump sheep and fat oxen pastured where the wild strawberry vine had trailed or the bull-frog had croaked under the alders. A sturdy, ingenious race the fathers of the new settlement, loving work almost as much as they feared God; turning their hand to anything, and opening it wide to the stranger. They raised their own houses, and fashioned their own tools, and shod their own horses, and later built their own vessels, and even sailed them to the great markets laden with the produce of their own fields and the timber from their own

saw-mills. There were women in this workaday paradise—shapely, gentle creatures, whose hands alone were rough with field and house-work; women who span and sang when the winter night-winds whistled round the settlement. The dramas of love and grief began to play themselves out where the raccoon and the chickadee had fleeted the golden hours in careless living. Children came to make the rafters habitable, and Death to sanctify them with memories. The air grew human with the smoke of hearths, the forest with legends and histories. And as houses grew into homes and villages into townships, Church and State arose where only Faith and Freedom had been.

The sons and heirs of the fathers did not always cling to the tradition of piety and perseverance. The "Bluenose" grew apathetic, content with the fatness of the day; or, if he exerted himself, it was too often to best a neighbor. The great magnets of New York and Boston drew off or drew back all that was iron in the race.

And amid these homely emotions of yeomen, amid the crude pieties or impieties of homespun souls, amid this sane hearty intercourse with realities or this torpor of sluggish spirits, was born ever and anon a gleam of fantasy, of imagination: bizarre, transfiguring, touching things with the glamour of dream. Blind instincts—blinder still in their loneliness—yearned towards light; beautiful emotions stirred in dumb souls, emotions that mayhap turned to morbid passion in the silence and solitude of the woods, where character may grow crabbed and gnarled, as well as sound and straight. For whereas to most of these human creatures, begirt by the glory of sea and forest, the miracles of sunrise and sunset were only the familiar indications of a celestial timepiece, and the starry heaven was but a leaky ceiling in their earthly habitation, there was here and there an eye keen to note the play of light and shade and color, the glint of wave and the sparkle of hoar-frost and the spume of tossing seas; the gracious fairness of cloud and bird and blossom, the magic of sunlit sails in the offing, the witchery of white winters, and all the changing wonder of the woods; a soul with scanty self-consciousness at best, yet haply absorbing Nature, to give it back one day as Art.

Ah, but to see the world with other eyes than one's fellows, yet express the vision of one's race, its subconscious sense of beauty, is not all a covetable dower.

The islands of Acadia are riddled with pits, where men have burrowed for Captain Kidd's Treasure and found nothing but holes. The deeper they delved the deeper holes they found. Whoso with blood and tears would dig Art out of his soul may lavish his golden prime in pursuit of emptiness, or, striking treasure, find only fairy gold, so that when his eye is purged of the spell of morning, he sees his hand is full of withered leaves.

Book II.—CHAPTER I

SOLITUDE

"Matt, Matt, what's thet thar noise?"

Matt opened his eyes vaguely, shaking off his younger brother's frantic clutch.

"It's on'y the frost," he murmured, closing his eyes again. "Go to sleep, Billy."

Since the sled accident that had crippled him for life, Billy was full of nervous terrors, and the night had been charged with mysterious noises. Within the lonely wooden house weather-boards and beams cracked; without, twigs snapped and branches crashed; at times Billy heard reports as loud as pistol-shots. One of these shots meant the bursting of the wash-basin on the bedroom bench, Matt having forgotten to empty its contents, which had expanded into ice.

Matt curled himself up more comfortably and almost covered his face with the blanket, for the cold in the stoveless attic was acute. In the gray half-light the rough beams and the quilts glistened with frozen breaths. The little square window-panes were thickly frosted, and below the crumbling rime was a thin layer of ice left from the day before, solid up to the sashes, and leaving no infinitesimal dot of clear glass, for there was nothing to thaw it except such heat as might radiate through the bricks of the square chimney that came all the way from the cellar through the centre of the flooring to pop its head through the shingled roof.

"Matt!" Billy was nudging his brother in the ribs again.

"Hullo!" grumbled the boy.

"Thet thar ain't the frost. Hark!"

"'Tis, I tell ye. Don't you hear the pop, pop, pop?"

"Not thet; t'other down-stairs."

"Oh, thet's the wind, I reckon."

"No; it's some 'un screamin'!"

Matt raised himself on his elbow, and listened.

"Why, you gooney, it's on'y mother rowin' Harriet," he said, reassuringly, and snuggled up again between the blankets.

The winter, though yet young, had already achieved a reputation. Blustrous north winds had driven inland, felling the trees like lumbermen. In the Annapolis Basin myriads of herrings, surprised by Jack Frost before their migratory instinct awoke, had been found frozen in the weirs, and the great salt tides overflowing the high dykes had been congealed into a chocolate sea that, when the liquid water beneath ran back through the sluices, lay solid on the marshes. By the shores of the Basin of Minas sea-birds flapped ghostlike over amber ice-cakes, whose mud-streaks under the kiss of the sun blushed like dragon's blood.

Snow had fallen heavily, whitening the "evergreen" hemlocks, and through the shapeless landscape half-buried oxen had toiled to clear the blurred roads bordered by snow-drifts, till the three familiar tracks of hoofs and sleigh-runners came in sight again. The stage to Truro ploughed its way along, with only dead freight on its roof and a furred animal or two, vaguely human, shivering inside. Sometimes the mail had to travel by horse, and sometimes it altogether disappointed Billy and his brothers and sisters of the excitement of its passage; for the stage road ran by the small clearing, in the centre of which their house and barn had been built—a primitive gabled house, like a Noah's ark, ugliness unadorned, and a cheap log barn of the "lean-to" type, with its cracks corked with moss, and a roof of slabs.

Jack Frost might stop the mail, but he could not stop the gayeties of the season. "Wooden frolics" and quilting-parties and candy-pullings and infares and Baptist revival-meetings had been as frequent as ever; and part of Matt's enjoyment of his couch was a delicious sense of oversleeping himself legitimately, for even his mother could hardly expect him to build the fire at five when he had only returned from Deacon Hailey's "muddin' frolic" at two. He saw himself coasting

down the white slopes in his hand-sled, watching the wavering radiance of the northern lights that paled the moon and the stars, and wishing his mother would not spoil the afterglow of the night's pleasure and the poetic silence of the woods by grumbling about his grown-up sister Harriet, who had deserted them for an earlier escort home. He felt himself well rewarded for his afternoon's labor in loading marsh mud for the top-dressing of Deacon Hailey's fields; and a sudden remembrance of how his mother had been rewarded for helping Mrs. Hailey to prepare the feast made him nudge Billy in his turn.

"Cheer up, Billy. We've brought back a basket o' goodies: there's plum-cake, doughnuts—"

"It's gettin' worst," said Billy. "Hark!"

Matt mumbled impatiently and redirected his thoughts to the "muddin' frolic." The images of the night swept before him with almost the vividness of actuality; he lost himself in memories as though they were realities, and every now and then a dash of sleep streaked these waking visions with the fantasy of dream.

"My, how the fiddle shrieks!" runs the boy's reminiscence. "Why don't ole Jupe do his tunin' to home, the pesky nigger? We're all waitin' for the reel — the 'fours' are all made up; Ruth Hailey and me hev took the floor. Ruth looks jest great with thet white frock an' the pink sash, thet's a fact. Hooray!—'The Devil among the Tailors!'—La, lalla, lalla, lalla, lalla, flip-flop!" He hears the big winter top-boots thwack the threshing-floor. Keep it up! Whoop! Faster! Ever faster! Oh, the joy of life!

Now he is swinging Ruth in his arms. Oh, the merry-go-round! The long rows of candles pinned by forks to the barn walls are guttering in the wind of the movement; the horses tied to their mangers neigh in excitement; from between their stanchions the mild-eyed cows gaze at the dancers, perking their naïve noses and tranquilly chewing the cud. A bat, thawed out of his winter nap by the heat of the temporary stove, flutters drowsily about the candles; and the odors of the stable and of the packed hay mingle with the scents of the ball-

room. Matt's exhaustive eye, though never long off pretty Ruth's face, takes in even the grains of wheat that gild many a tousled head of swain or lass as the shaking of the beams dislodges the unthreshed kernels in the mow under the eaves, and, keener even than the eye of his collie, Sprat, notes the mice that dart from their holes to seize the fallen drops of tallow. But perhaps Sprat is only lazy, for he will not vacate his uncomfortable snuggery under the stove, though he has to shift his carcass incessantly to escape the jets of tobacco-juice constantly squirted in his direction. It serves him right, thinks his young master, for persisting in coming, though, for the matter of that, the creature, having superintended the mud-hauling, has more right to be present than Bully Preep. "Wonder why sister Harriet lets him dance with her so of'n!" the panorama of his thought proceeds. "What kin she see in the skunk, fur lan' sakes? I told her 'bout the way he bully-ragged me when he was boss o' the school and I was a teeny shaver. But she don't seem to care a snap. Girls are queer critters, thet's a fact. He used to put a chip on my shoulder, an' egg the fellers on to flick it off. But, gosh! didn't I hit him a lick when he pulled little Ruth's hair? He'd a black eye, thet's a fact, though he giv' me two, an' mother an' teacher 'ud a giv' me one more apiece, but there warn't no more left. I took it out in picters though, I guess. My! didn't ole McTavit's face jest look reedic'lous when he discovered Bully Preep in the fly-leaf of every readin'-book. Thet's jest how mother is glarin' at Harriet this moment. Pop! pop! pop! What a lot o' ginger-beer an' spruce-beer Deacon Hailey is openin'! Pop! pop! pop! He don't seem to notice them thar black bottles o' rum. He's 'tarnal cute, is ole Hey. Seems like he's talkin' to mother. Wonder how she kin understand him. He allus talks as if his mouth was full o' words—but it's on'y tobacco, I reckon. Pop! pop! pop! Thet's what I allus hear him say, windin' up with a 'Hey'—an' it does rile me some to refuse pumpkin-pie, not knowin' he's invitin' me to anythin' but hay. I 'spect mother's heerd him talk considerable, just es I've heerd the jays an' the woodpeckers; though she kin't tell one from t'other, I vow, through bein' raised at

Halifax. Thunderation! thet's never her dancin' with ole Hey! My stars, what'll her elders say? Well, I wow! She *is* backslidin'. Ah, she recollecks! She pulls up, her face is like a beet. Ole Hey is argufyin', but she hangs back in her traces. I reckon she kinder thinks she's kicked over the dashboard this time. Ah, he's gone and taken Harriet for a pardner instead; he'll like sister better, I guess. By gum! He's kickin' up his heels like a colt when it fust feels the crupper. I do declare Marm Hailey is lookin' pesky ugly 'bout it. She's a mighty handsome critter, anyways. Pity she kin't wear her hat with the black feather indoors—she does look jest spliffin' when she drives her horses through the snow. Whoop! Keep it up! Sling it out, ole Jupe! More rosin. Yankee doodle, keep it up, Yankee doodle dandy! Go it, you cripples; I'll hold your crutches! Why, there's Billy dancin' with the crutch I made him!" he tells himself as his vision merges in dream. "Pop! pop! pop! How his crutch thumps the floor! Poor Billy! Fancy hevin' to hop through life on thet thar crutch, like a robin on one leg! Or shall I hev to make him a longer one when he's growed up? Mebbe he won't grow up—mebbe he'll allus be the identical same size; and when he's an ole man he'll be the right size again, an' the crutch 'll on'y be a sorter stick. I wish I hed a stick to make this durned cow keep quiet — I kin't milk her! So! so! Daisy! Ole Jupe's music ain't for four-legged critters to dance to! My! what's thet nonsense 'bout a cow? Why, I'm dreamin'. Whoa, there! Give her a tickler in the ribs, Billy. Hullo! look out! here's father come back from sea! Quick, Billy, chuck your crutch in the hay-mow. Kin't you stand straighter nor that? Unkink your leg, or father 'll never take *you* out to be a pirate. Fancy a pirate on a crutch! It was my fault, father, for fixin' up thet thar fandango, but mother's lambasted me a'ready, an' she wanted to shoot herself. But it don't matter to you, father—you're allus away a'most, an' Billy's crutch kin't get into your eye like it does into mother's. She was afeared to write to you 'bout it. Thet's on'y Billy in a fit — you see, Daisy kicked him, and they couldn't fix his leg back proper; it don't fit, so he hes fits now an' then. He'll

never be a pirate now. Drive the crutch deeper into the ice, Charley; steady there with the long pole. The iron pin goes into the crutch, Billy; don't get off the ashes, you'll slide under the sled. Now, then, is the rope right? Jump on the sled, you girls and fellers! Round with the pole! Whoop! Hooray! Ain't she scootin' jest! Let her rip! Pop! Snap! Geewiglets! The rope's give! Don't jump off, Billy, I tell you; you'll kill yourself! Stick in your toes an' don't yowl; we'll slacken at the dykes. Look at Ruth—*she* don't scream. Thunderation! We're goin' over into the river! Hold tight, you uns! Bang! Smash! We're on the ice-cakes! Is thet you thet's screamin', Billy? You ain't hurt, I tell you—don't yowl—you gooney—don't—"

But it was not Billy's voice that he heard screaming when the films of sleep really cleared away. The little cripple was nestling close up to him with the same panic-stricken air as when they rode that flying sled together. This time it was impossible to mistake their mother's voice for the wind — it rose clearly in hysterical vituperation.

"An' you orter be 'shamed o' yourself, I do declare, goin' home all alone in a sleigh with a young man — in the dead o' night, too!"

"There were more nor ourn on the road; and since Abner Preep was perlite enough—"

"Yes, an' you didn't think o' *me* on the road oncet, I bet! If young Preep wanted to do the perlite, he'd 'a' took *me* in his father's sleigh, not a wholesome young gal."

"But I was tar'd out with dancin' e'en a'most, and you on'y—"

"Don't you talk about *my* dancin', you blabbin' young slummix! Jest keep your eye on your Preeps with their bow-legs an' their pigeon-toes."

"His legs is es straight es yourn, anyhow."

"P'raps you'll say thet I've got Injun blood next. Look at his round shoulders and his lanky hair—he's a Micmac, thet's what he is. He on'y wants a few baskets and butter-tubs to make him look nateral. Ugh! I kin smell spruce every time I think on him."

"It's you that hev hed too much spruce-beer, *hey?*"

"You sassy minx! Folks hev no right to bring eyesores into the world. I'd rather stab you than see you livin' with Abner Preep. It's a squaw he wants, thet's a fact, not a wife!"

"I'd rather stab myself than go on livin' with *you.*"

For a moment or two Matt listened in silent torture. The frequency of these episodes had made him resigned, but not callous. Now Harriet's sobs were added to the horror of the altercation, and Matt fancied he heard a sound of scuffling. He jumped out of bed in an agony of alarm. He pulled on his trousers, caught up his coat, and slipped it on as he flew barefoot down the rough wooden stairs, with his woollen braces dangling behind him.

In the narrow icy passage at the foot of the stairs, in the bleak light from the row of little crusted panes on either side of the door, he found his mother and sister, their rubber-cased shoes half-buried in snow that had drifted in under the door. Mrs. Strang was fully dressed in her "frolickin'" costume, which at that period included a crinoline; she wore an astrakhan sacque, reaching to the knees, and a small poke-bonnet, plentifully beribboned, blooming with artificial flowers within and without, and tied under the chin by broad, black, watered bands. Round her neck was a fringed afghan, or home-knit muffler She was a tall, dark, voluptuously-built woman, with blazing black eyes and handsome features of a somewhat Gallic cast, for she came of old Huguenot stock. She stood now drawing on her mittens in terrible silence, her bosom heaving, her nostrils quivering. Harriet was nearer the door, flushed and panting and sobbing, a well-developed auburn blonde of sixteen, her hair dishevelled, her bodice unhooked, a strange contrast to the other's primness.

"Where you goin'?" she said, tremulously, as she barred her mother's way with her body.

"I'm goin' to drownd myself," answered her mother, carefully smoothing out her right mitten.

"Nonsense, mother," broke in Matt. "You kin't go out—it's snowin'."

He brushed past the pair and placed himself with his back to the door, his heart beating painfully. His mother's mad threats were familiar enough, yet they never ceased to terrify. Some day she might really do something desperate. Who knew?

"I'm goin' to drownd myself," repeated Mrs. Strang, carefully winding the muffler round her head.

She made a step towards the door, sweeping the limp Harriet roughly behind her.

"You kin't get out," Matt said, firmly. "Why, you hevn't hed breakfast yet."

"What do I want o' breakfus? Your sister is breakfus 'nough for me. Clear out o' the way."

"Don't you let her go, Matt!" cried Harriet. "I'll quit instead."

"You!" exclaimed her mother, turning fiercely upon her, while her eyes spat fire. "You are young and wholesome—the world is afore you. You were not brought from a great town to be buried in a wilderness. Marry your Preeps an' your Micmacs, and nurse your pappooses. God has cursed me with froward children an' a cripple, an' a husband that goes gallivantin' onchristianly about the world with never a thought for his 'mortal soul, an' the Lord has doomed me to worship Him in the wrong church. Mother yourselves; I throw up the position."

"Is it my fault if father hesn't wrote you lately?" cried Harriet. "Is it my fault if there's no Baptist church to Cobequid village?"

"Shut your mouth, you brazen hussy! You've drove your mother to her death! Stand out o' my way, Matthew; don't you disobey my dyin' reques'."

"I sha'n't," said the boy, squaring his shoulders firmly against the door. "Where kin you drownd yourself? The pond's froze an' the tide's out."

He could think of no other argument for the moment, and he had an incongruous vision of her sliding down to the river on her stomach, as the boys often did, down the steep, reddish-brown slopes of greasy mud, or sinking into a squash-hole like an errant horse.

"HE PLACED HIMSELF WITH HIS BACK TO THE DOOR"

"Why, there's on'y mud-flats," he added.

"I'll wait on the mud-flats fur the merciful tide." She fastened her bonnet-strings firmly.

"The river is full of ice," he urged.

"There will be room fur me," she answered. Then, with a sudden exclamation of dismay, "My God! you've got no shoes and socks on! You'll ketch your death. Go up-stairs d'reckly."

"No," replied Matt, becoming conscious for the first time of a cold wave creeping up his spinal marrow. "I'll ketch my death, then," and he sneezed vehemently.

"Put on your shoes an' socks d'reckly, you wretched boy. You know what a bother I hed with you last time."

He shook his head, conscious of a trump card.

"D'ye hear me! Put on your shoes and socks!"

"Take off your bonnet an' sacque," retorted Matt, clinching his fists.

"Put on your shoes an' socks!" repeated his mother.

"Take off your bonnet an' sacque, an' I'll put on my shoes an' socks."

They stood glaring defiance at each other, like a pair of duellists, their breaths rising in the frosty air like the smoke of pistols—these two grotesque figures in the gray light of the bleak passage, the tall, fierce brunette, in her flowery bonnet and astrakhan sacque, and the small, shivering, sneezing boy, in his patched homespun coat, with his trailing braces and bare feet. They heard Harriet's teeth chatter in the silence.

"Go back to bed, you young varmint," said Matt, suddenly catching sight of Billy's white face and gray night-gown on the landing above. "You'll ketch your death."

There was a scurrying sound from above, a fleeting glimpse of other little night-gowned figures. Matt and his mother still confronted each other warily. And then the situation was broken up by the near approach of sleigh-bells. They stopped slowly, mingling their jangling with the creak of runners sliding over frosty snow, then the scrunch of heavy boots travelled across the clearing. Harriet flushed in modest alarm and fled up-stairs. Mrs. Strang hastily retreated into the kitchen, and for one brief moment Matt breathed freely, till, hearing the

click of the door-latch, he scented gunpowder. He dashed towards the door and pressed the thumb-latch, but it was fastened from within.

"Harriet!" he gasped, "the gun! the gun!"

He beat at the door, his imagination seeing through it. His loaded gun was resting on the wooden hooks fastened to the beam in the ceiling. He heard his mother mount a chair; he tried to break open the door, but could not. The chances of getting round by the back way flashed into his mind, only to be dismissed as quickly. There was no time—in breathless agony he waited the report of the gun. Crash! A strange, unexpected sound smote his ears—he heard the thud of his mother's body striking the floor. She had stabbed herself, then, instead. Half mad with excitement and terror, he backed to the end of the passage, took a running leap, and dashed with his mightiest momentum against the frail battened door. Off flew the catch, open flew the door with Matt in pursuit, and it was all the boy could do to avoid tumbling over his mother, who sat on the floor among the ruins of a chair, rubbing her shins, her bonnet slightly disarranged, and the gun, still loaded, demurely on its perch. What had happened was obvious; some of the little Strang mice, taking advantage of the cat's absence at the "muddin' frolic," had had a frolic on their own account, turning the chair into a sled, and binding up its speedily-broken leg to deceive the maternal eye. It might have supported a sitter; under Mrs. Strang's feet it had collapsed ere her hand could grasp the gun.

"The pesky young varmints!" she exclaimed, full of this new grievance. "They might hev crippled me fur life. Always a-tearin' an' a-rampagin' an' a-ruinatin'. I kin't keep two sticks together. It's 'nough to make a body throw up the position."

The sound of the butt-end of a whip battering the front-door brought her to her feet with a bound. She began dusting herself hastily with her hand.

"Well, what 're you gawkin' at?" she inquired. "Kin't you go an' unbar the door, 'stead o' standin' there like a stuck pig?"

Matt knew the symptoms of volcanic extinction; without further parley he ran to the door and took down the beechen

bar. The visitor was "ole Hey," who drove the mail. The deacon came in, powdered as from his own grist-mill, and added the snow of his top-boots to the drift in the hall. There were leather-faced mittens on his hands, ear-laps on his cap, tied under the chin, a black muffler, hoary with frost from his breath, round his neck and mouth, and an outer coat of buffalo-skin swathing his body down to his ankles, so that all that was visible of him was a little inner circle of red face with frosted eyebrows.

Mrs. Strang stood ready in the hall with a genial smile, and Matt, his heart grown lighter, returned to the kitchen, extracted the family foot-gear from under the stove, where it had been placed to thaw, and putting on his own still-sodden top-boots, he set about shaving whittlings and collecting kindlings to build the fire.

"Here we are again, hey!" cried the deacon, as heartily as his perpetual, colossal quid would permit.

"Do tell! is it really you?" replied Mrs. Strang, with her pleasant smile.

"Yes—dooty is dooty, I allus thinks," he said, spitting into the snow-drift and flicking the snow over the tobacco-juice with his whip. "Whatever Deacon Hailey's hand finds to do he does fust-rate—thet's a fact. It don't seem so long a while since you and me were shakin' our heels in the Sir Roger. Nay, don't look so peaked—there's nuthin' to make such a touse about. You air a *partic'ler* Baptist, hey? An' I guess you kinder allowed Deacon Hailey would be late with the mail, hey? But he's es spry es if he'd gone to bed with the fowls. You won't find the beat of *him* among the young fellers nowadays —thet's so. They're a lazy, slinky lot; and es for doin' their dooty to their country or their neighbor—"

"Hev you brought me a letter?" interrupted Mrs. Strang, anxiously.

"I guess—but you're goin' out airly?"

"I allowed I'd walk over to the village to see if it hed come."

"Oh, but it ain't the one you expec'."

"No?" she faltered.

"I guess not. Thet's why I brought it myself. I kinder

scented it was suthin' special, and so I reckoned I'd save you the trouble of trudgin' to the post-office. Deacon Hailey ain't the man to spare himself trouble to obleege a fellow-critter. Do es you'd be done by, hey?" The deacon never lost an opportunity of pointing the moral of a position. Perhaps his sermonizing tendency was due to his habit of expounding the Sunday texts at a weekly meeting, or perhaps his weekly exposition was due to his sermonizing tendency.

"Thank you." Mrs. Strang extended her hand for the letter. He produced it slowly, apparently from up the sleeve of his topmost coat, a wet, forlorn-looking epistle, addressed in a sprawling hand. Mrs. Strang turned it about, puzzled.

"P'raps it's from Uncle Matt," ejaculated Matt, appearing suddenly at the kitchen door.

"You've got Uncle Matt on the brain," said Mrs. Strang. "It's a Halifax stamp." She could not understand it; her own family rarely wrote to her, and there was no hand of theirs in the address. Deacon Hailey lingered on, apparently prepared, in his consideration for others, to listen to the contents of his "fellow-critter's" letter.

"Ah, sonny," he said to Matt, "only jest turned out, and not slicked up yet. When I was your age I hed done my day's chores afore the day hed begun. No wonder the Province is so 'tarnally behindhand, hey?"

"Thet's so," Matt murmured. Pop! pop! pop! was all that he heard, so that ole Hey's moral exhortations left him neither a better nor a wiser boy.

Mrs. Strang still held the letter in her hand, apparently having become indifferent to it. Ole Hey did not know she was waiting for him to go, so that she might put on her spectacles and read it. She never wore her spectacles in public, any more than she wore her nightcap. Both seemed to her to belong to the privacies of the inner life, and glasses in particular made an old woman of one before one's time. If she had worn out her eyes with needle-work and tears, that was not her neighbors' business.

The deacon, with no sign of impatience, elaborately unbuttoned his outer buffalo-skin, then the overcoat beneath that, and the coat under that, and then, pulling up the edge of his cardi-

gan that fitted tightly over his waistcoats, he toilsomely thrust his horny paw into his breeches-pocket and hauled out a fig of "black-jack." Then he slowly produced from the other pocket a small tool-chest in the guise of a pocket-knife, and proceeded to cut the tobacco with one of the instruments.

"Come here, sonny!" he cried.

"The deacon wants you," said Mrs. Strang.

Matt moved forward into the passage, wondering. Ole Hey solemnly held up the wedge of black-jack he had cut, and when Matt's eye was well fixed on it he dislodged the old "chaw" from his cheek with contortions of the mouth, and blew it out with portentous gravity. Lastly, he replaced it by the wedge of "black-jack," mouthed and moulded the new quid conscientiously between tongue and teeth, and passed the ball into his right cheek.

"Thet's the way to succeed in life, sonny. Never throw away dirty afore you got clean, hey?"

Poor Matt, unconscious of the lesson, waited inquiringly and deferentially, but the deacon was finished, and turned again to his mother.

"I 'spect it 'll be from some of the folks to home, mebbe."

"Mebbe," replied Mrs. Strang, longing for solitude and spectacles.

"When did you last hear from the boss?"

"He was in the South Seas, the capt'n, sellin' beads to the savages. He'd a done better to preach 'em the Word, I do allow."

"Ah, you kin't expect godliness from sailors," said the deacon. "It's in the sea es the devil spreads his nets, thet's a fact."

"The Apostles were fishermen," Mrs. Strang reminded him.

"Yes; but fishers ain't sailors, Mrs. Strang. It's in furrin parts that the devil lurks, and the further a man goes from his family the nearer he goes to the devil, hey?"

Mrs. Strang winced. "But he's gittin' our way now," she protested, unguardedly. "He's comin' South with a freight."

"Ah, joined the blockade-runners, hey?"

Mrs. Strang bit her lip and flushed. "I don't kear," the dea-

con said, reassuringly. "I don't see why Nova Scotia should go solid for the North. What's the North done for Nova Scotia 'cept ruin us with their protection dooties, gol durn 'em. They won't have slaves, hey? Ain't we their slaves? Don't they skin us es clean es a bear does a sheep? Ain't they allus on the lookout to snap up the Province? But I never talk politics. If the North and South want to cut each other's throats, that's not our consarn. Mind your own business, I allus thinks, hey? And if your boss kin make a good spec by provisionin' the Southerners, you'll be a plaguy sight better off, I vow. And so will I—for, you know, I shall hev to call in the mortgage unless you fork out thet thar interest purty slick. There's no underhandedness about Deacon Hailey. He gives you fair warnin'."

"D'rectly the letter comes you shall have it—I've often told you so."

"Mebbe thet 'll be his letter, after all—put his thumb out, I guess, and borrowed another feller's, hey?"

"No—he'd be nowhere near Halifax," said Mrs. Strang, her feverish curiosity mounting momently. "Don't them thar sleigh-bells play a tune! I guess your horses air gettin' kinder restless."

"Well—there's nuthin' I kin do for you to Cobequid Village?" he said, lingeringly.

Mrs. Strang shook her head. "Thank you, I guess not."

"You wouldn't kear to write an answer now—I'd be tolerable pleased to post it for you down thar. Allus study your fellow-critters, I allus thinks."

"No, thank you."

Deacon Hailey spat deliberately on the floor.

"Er—you got to home safe this mornin'?"

"Yes, thank you. We all come together, me and Harriet and Matt. 'Twere a lovely walk in the moonlight, with the Aurora Borealis a-quiverin' and a-flushin' on the northern horizon."

"A-h-h," said the deacon slowly, and rather puzzled. "A roarer! Hey?"

At this moment a sudden stampede of hoofs and a mad

jangling of bells were heard without. With a "Durn them beasts!" the deacon breathlessly turned tail and fled in pursuit of the mail-sleigh, mounting it over the luggage-rack. When he had turned the corner, Matt's grinning face emerged from behind the snow-capped stump of a juniper.

"I reckon I fetched him thet time," he said, throwing away the remaining snowball, as he hastened gleefully inside to partake of the contents of the letter.

He found his mother sitting on the old settle in the kitchen, her spectacled face gray as the sand on the floor, her head bowed on her bosom. One limp hand held the crumpled letter. She reminded him of a drooping foxglove. The room had a heart of fire now, the stove in the centre glowed rosily with rock-maple brands, but somehow it struck a colder chill to Matt's blood than before.

"Father's drownded," his mother breathed.

"He'll never know 'bout Billy now," he thought, with a gleam of relief.

Mrs. Strang began to wring her mittened hands silently, and the letter fluttered from between her fingers. Matt made a dart at it, and read as follows:

DEAR MARM,—Don't take on but ime sorrie to tell you that the Cap is a gone goose we run the block kade onst slick but the 2 time we was took by them allfird Yanks we reckkend to bluff 'em in the fog but about six bells a skwad of friggets bore down on us sudden like ole nick the cap he sees he was hemd in on a lee shoar and he swears them lubberly northers shan't have his ship not if he goes to Davy Jones his loker he lufs her sharp up into the wind and sings out lower the longbote boys and while the shot was tearin and crashin through the riggin he springs to the hall-yards and hauls down the cullers then jumps through the lazzaret into the store room kicks the head of a carsk of ile in clinches a bit of oakem dips it in the ile and touches a match to it and drops it on the deck into the runin ile and then runs for it hisself jumps into the bote safe with the cullers and we sheer off into the fog mufflin our oars with our caps and afore that tarnation flame bust out to show where we were we warnt there but we heard the everlastin fools poundin away at the poor old innocent *Sally Bell* till your poor boss dear marm he larfs and ses he shipmets ses he look at good old *Sally* she's stickin out her yellow tongue at em and grinnin at the dam goonies beg pardon marm but that was his way he never larfed no more for wed disremembered the cumpess and drifted outer the fog into a skwall and the night was comin

on and we drov blind on a reef and capsized but we all struck out for shore and allowed the cap was setting sale the same way as the rest on us but when we reached the harbor the cap he warnt at the helm and a shipmet ses ses he as how he would swim with that air bundle of cullers that was still under his arm and they tangelled round his legs and sorter dragged him under and kep him down like sea-weed and now dear marm he lays in the Gulf of Mexiker kinder rapped in a shroud and gone aloft I was the fust mate and a better officer I never wish to sine with for tho he did sware till all was blue his hart was like an unborn babbys and wishing you a merry christmas and God keep you and the young orfuns and giv you a happy new year dear marm you deserve it.

ime yours to command,

HOSEA CUDDY (Mate).

p s.—i would have writ erlier, but i couldn't get your address till i worked my way to Halifax and saw the owners scuse me not puttin this in a black onwellop i calclated to brake it eesy.

Matt hastily took in the gist of the letter, then stood folding it carefully, at a loss what to say to the image of grief rocking on the settle. From the barn behind came the lowing of Daisy —half protestation, half astonishment at the unpunctuality of her breakfast. Matt found a momentary relief in pitying the cow. Then his mother's voice burst out afresh.

"My poor Davie," she moaned. "Cut off afore you could repent, too deep down fur me to kiss your dead lips. I hevn't even got a likeness o' you; you never would be took. I shall never see your face again on airth, and I misdoubt if I'll meet you in heaven."

"Of course you will—he saved his flag," said Matt, with shining eyes.

His mother shook her head, and set the roses on her bonnet nodding gayly to the leaping flame. "Your father was born a Sandemanian," she sighed.

"What is thet?" said Matt.

"Don't ask me; there air things boys mustn't know. And you've seen in the letter 'bout his profane langwidge. I never would 've run off with him; all my folks were agen it, and a sore time I've hed in the wilderness 'way back from my beautiful city. But it was God's finger. I pricked the Bible fur a verse, an' it came: 'An' they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she

constantly affirmed it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.' "

She nodded and muttered, "An' I was his angel," and the roses trembled in the firelight. "If you were a good boy, Matt," she broke off, "you'd know where thet thar varse come from."

"Hedn't I better tell Harriet?" he asked.

"Acts, chapter eleven, verse fifteen," muttered his mother. "It was the finger of God. What's thet you say 'bout Harriet? Ain't she finished tittivatin' herself yet—with her father layin' dead, too?" She got up and walked to the foot of the stairs. "Harriet!" she shrieked.

Harriet dashed down the stairs, neat and pretty.

"You onchristian darter!" cried Mrs. Strang, revolted by her sprightliness. "Don't you know father's drownded?"

Harriet fell half-fainting against the banister. Mrs. Strang caught her and pulled her towards the kitchen.

"There, there," she said, "don't freeze out here, my poor child. The Lord's will be done."

Harriet mutely dropped into the chair her mother drew for her before the stove. Daisy's bellowing became more insistent.

"An' he never lived to take me back to Halifax, arter all!" moaned Mrs. Strang.

"Never mind, mother," said Harriet, gently. "God will send you back some day. You hev suffered enough."

Mrs. Strang burst into tears for the first time. "Ah, you don't know what my life hes been!" she cried, in a passion of self-pity.

Harriet took her mother's mittened hand tenderly in hers. "Yes we do, mother—yes we do. We know how you hev slaved and struggled."

As she spoke a panorama of the slow years was fleeting through the minds of all three—the long blank weeks uncolored by a letter, the fight with poverty, the outbursts of temper; all the long-drawn pathos of lonely lives. Tears gathered in the children's eyes—more for themselves than for their dead father, who for the moment seemed but gone on a longer voyage.

"Harriet," said Mrs. Strang, choking back her sobs, "bring down my poor little orphans, and wrap them up well. We'll say a prayer."

Harriet gathered herself together and went weeping up the stairs. Matt followed her with a sudden thought. He ran up to his room and returned, carrying a square sheet of rough paper.

His mother had sunk into Harriet's chair. He lifted up her head and showed her the paper.

"Davie!" she shrieked, and showered passionate kisses on the crudely-colored sketch of a sailor — a figure that had a strange touch of vitality, a vivid suggestion of brine and breeze. She arrested herself suddenly. "You pesky varmint!" she cried. "So this is what become o' the fly-leaf of the big Bible!"

Matt hung his head. "It was empty," he murmured.

"Yes, but there's another page thet ain't—thet tells you to obey your parents. This is how you waste your time 'stead o' wood-choppin'."

"Uncle Matt earns his livin' at it," he urged.

"Uncle Matt's a villain. Don't you go by your Uncle Matt, fur lan's sake." She rolled up the drawing fiercely, and Matt placed himself apprehensively between it and the stove.

"You said he wouldn't be took," he remonstrated.

Mrs. Strang sullenly placed the paper in her bosom, and the action reminded her to remove her bonnet and sacque. Harriet, drooping and listless, descended the stairs, carrying the two-year-old and marshalling the other little ones—a blinking, bewildered group of cherubs, with tousled hair and tumbled clothes. Sprat came down last, stretching himself sleepily. He had kept the same late hours as Matt, and, returning with him from the "muddin' frolic," had crept under his bed.

The sight of the children moved Mrs. Strang to fresh weeping. She almost tore the baby from Harriet's arms.

"He never saw you!" she cried, hysterically, closing the wee yawning mouth with kisses. Her eyes fell on Billy limping towards the red-hot stove where the others were already clustered.

"An' he never saw *you*," she cried to him, as she adjusted the awed infant on the settle. "Or it would hev broke his heart. Kneel down and say a prayer for him, you mischeevious little imp."

Billy, thus suddenly apostrophized, paled with nervous fright. His big gray eyes grew moist, a lump rose in his throat. But he knelt down with the rest and began bravely:

"Our Father, which art in heaven—"

"Well, what are you stoppin' about?" jerked his mother, for the boy had paused suddenly with a strange light in his eyes.

"I never knowed what it meant afore," he said, simply.

His mother's eye caught the mystic gleam from his.

"A sign! a sign!" she cried, ecstatically, as she sprang up and clasped the little cripple passionately to her heaving bosom.

CHAPTER II

THE DEAD MAN MAKES HIS FIRST AND LAST APPEARANCE

The death of his father—of whom he had seen so little—gave Matt a haunting sense of the unsubstantiality of things. What! that strong, wiry man, with the shrewd, weather-beaten face and the great tanned hands and tattooed arms, was only a log swirling in the currents of unknown waters! In vain he strove to figure him as a nebulous spirit—the conception would not stay. Nay, the incongruity seemed to him to touch blasphemy. His father belonged to the earth and the seas; had no kinship with clouds. How well he remembered the day, nearly three years ago, when they had parted forever, and, indeed, it had been sufficiently stamped upon his memory without this final blow.

It is a day of burning August—so torrid that they have left their coats on the beach. They are out on the sand flats, wading for salmon among the giant saucers of salt water, the miniature lakes left by the tide, for this is one of the rare spots in

the Province where the fish may be taken thus. What fun it is spearing them in a joyous rivalry that makes the fishers well-nigh jab each other's toes with their pitchforks, and completely tear each other's shirt-sleeves away in the friendly tussle for a darting monster, so that the heat blisters their arms with great white blobs that stand out against the brown of the boy's skin and the ornamental coloring of the man's. Now and then in their early course, when tiny threads of water spurt from holes in the sand, they pause to dig up the delicate clam, with savory anticipations of chowder. Farther and farther they wander till their backs are bowed with the spoil, the shell-fish in a little basket, the scaly fish strung together by a small rope passing through their gills. The boy carries the shad and the man the heavier salmon. At last, as they are turning homeward, late in the afternoon, Matt stands still suddenly, rapt by the poetry of the scene, the shimmering pools, the stretch of brown sand, strewn with sea-weeds, the background of red head-lands, crowned with scattered yellow farms embosomed in sombre green spruces, and, brooding over all, the windless circle of the horizon, its cold blue veiled and warmed and softened by a palpitating, luminous, diaphanous haze of pale amethyst tinged with rose. He knows no word for what he sees; he only feels the beauty.

"Come along, sonny," says his father, looking back.

But the boy lingers still till the man rejoins him, puzzled.

"What's in the wind?" he asks. "Is Farmer Wade's barn on fire?"

"Everythin's on faar," says the boy, waving his pitchfork comprehensively. His dialect differs a whit from his more-travelled father's. In his little God-forsaken corner of Acadia the variously-proportioned mixture of English and American which, with local variations of Lowland and Highland Scotch, North of Ireland brogue and French patois, loosely constitutes a Nova-Scotian idiom, is further tinged with the specific peculiarities that spring from illiteracy and rusticity.

David Strang smiles. "Why, you are like brother Matt," he says, in amused astonishment. All day his son's prattle has amused the stranger, but this is a revelation.

"Like your wicked brother Matt?" queries the boy in amaze. David's smile gleams droller.

"Avast there, you mustn't hearken to the mother. She knows naught o' Matt 'cept what I told her. She is Halifax bred, and we lived 'way up country. I ran away to sea, and left him anchored on dad's farm. When I made port again dad was gone to glory, and Matt to England with a petticoat in tow."

"But mother said he sold the farm, an' your share, too."

"And if he didn't it's a pity. He had improved the land, hadn't he? and I might have been sarved up at fish dinners for all he knew. I don't hold with this Frenchy law that says all the bairns must share and share alike. The good old Scotch fashion is good 'nough for me—Matt's the heir, and God bless him."

"Then why didn't you marry a Scotchwoman?" asked Matt, with childish irrelevance.

"'Twas your mother's fault," answers David, with a half-whimsical, half-pathetic expression.

"And why didn't you take her to sea with you?"

"Nay, nay; the mother has no stomach for it, nor I either. And then there was Harriet—a little body in long clothes. And the land was pretty nigh cleared," he adds, with a suspicion of apology in his accent, "and we couldn't grow 'nough to pay the mortgage if I hadn't shipped again."

"And why am I like uncle?"

"Oh, he used to be allus lookin' at the sky—not to find out whether to git the hay in, mind you, but to make little picturs on the sly in the hay-mow on Sundays, and at last he sold the farm and went to London to make 'em."

Matt's heart begins to throb—a strange new sense of kinship stirs within him.

"Hev you got any of them thar picturs?" he inquires, eagerly.

"Not one," says David, shaking his head contemptuously. "His clouds were all right, because clouds may be anything; but when he came to cows, their own dams wouldn't know 'em; and as for his ships—why, he used to hoist every inch o' canvas in a hur'cane. I wouldn't trust him to tattoo a galley-boy. But he had a power of industry, dear old Matt; and I guess he's

larnt better now, for when I writ to him tellin' him I was alive and goin' to get spliced, he writ back he was settled in London in the pictur line, and makin' money at it, and good-luck to him."

Matt's heart swells. That one can actually make money by making pictures is a new idea. He has never imagined that money can be made so easily. Why, he might help to pay off the mortgage! He does not see the need of going to London to make them—he can make them quite well here in his odd moments, and one day he will send them all to this wonderful kinsman of his and ask him to sell them. Five hundred at sixpence each—why, it sounds like one of those faëry calculations with which McTavit sometimes dazzles the school-room. He wonders vaguely whether pictures are equally vendible at that other mighty city whence his mother came, and, if so, whether he may not perhaps help her to accomplish the dream of her married life—the dream of going back there.

"An' uncle's got the same name as me!" he cries, in ecstasy.

"I should put it t'other way, sonny," says his father, dryly; "though when I give it you in his honor I didn't calc'late it 'ud make you take arter him. But don't you git it into your figure-head that you're goin' to London—you've jest got to stay right here and look arter the farm for mother. See? The picturs that God's made are good 'nough for me—that's so."

"Oh yes, dad, I shall allus stay on here," answers Matt, readily. "It's Billy who allus wants to be a pirate. Silly Billy! He says—"

His father silences him with a sudden "Damn!"

"What's the matter?" he asks, startled.

"I guess you're the silly Billy, standin' jabberin' when the tide's a-rushin' in. We'll have to run for it."

Matt gives a hasty glance to the left, then takes to his heels straight across the sands in pace with his father. The famous "bore" of the Bay of Fundy, in a northerly inlet of which they have been fishing, is racing towards them from the left, and to get to shore they must shoot straight across the galloping current. They are at the head of the bay, where the tide reaches a maximum speed of ten miles an hour, and the sailor, so rarely at home, has forgotten its idiosyncrasy.

"You might ha' kep' your weather-eye open," he growls. "I wonder you've never been drownded afore."

"We shall never do it, father," pants Matt, taking no notice of the reproach, for the waves are already lapping the rim of the little sand island (cut out by fresh-water rivulets) on which they find themselves, and the pools in which they had waded are filling up rapidly.

"Throw 'em away," jerks the father; and Matt, with a sigh of regret, unstrings his piscine treasures, and, economically putting the string into his pocket, speeds on with renewed strength. But the sun flares mercilessly through the fulgent haze; and when they reach the end of their island they step into three feet of water, with the safe shore a quarter of a mile off. David Strang, a human revolver in oaths, goes off in a favorite sequence of shots, but hangs fire in the middle, as if damped.

"Strikes me the mother 'll quote Scripture," he says, grimly, instead.

"I suppose you can't swim, sonny?" he adds.

"Not so fur nor thet," says Matt, meekly.

David grunts in triumphant anger, and, shifting his pitchfork to his left hand, he grasps Matt with his right, and lifts him back on to the burning sand, already soddened by a thin frothy wash.

"Now then, han' us your fork," he says, crossly. He knocks out the iron prongs of both the pitchforks, ties the wooden handles securely together by the string from Matt's discarded fish, and fixes the apparatus across the boy's breast and under his arms. To finish the job easily he has to climb back on the sand island; for, though he stands in a little eddy, it is impossible to keep his feet against the fierce swirl of the waters; and even on the island, where there are as yet only a few inches of sea, the less sturdy Matt is almost swept away to the right by the mad cavalry charge of the tide on his left flank.

"Now then," cries David, "it's about time we were home to supper. I'll swim ye for your flapjacks."

"But, father," says Matt, "you're not going to carry the fish on your back?"

"They won't carry me on theirs," David laughs, regaining

his good-humor as the critical moment arrives. "What wou the mother think if we came home without a prize in tow Avast there! I'll larn you how I'll get out of carryin' 'em o my back."

And with a chuckle he launches himself into the eddy, an shoots forward with a vigorous side-stroke. "This side up wi care," he cries cheerily. "Jump, sonny, straight for'ards And in a moment the man and the boy are swimming hard fo the strip of shore directly opposite the sand island, the spo where they had left their coats hours before; but neither h the slightest expectation of reaching it, for the tide is sweepin them with fearful velocity to the right of it, so that their cour is diagonal; and if they make land at all, it will be very far fro their original starting-point. David keeps the boy to port, an adjusts his stroke to his. After a while, feeling himself wo buoyed up by the handles, Matt breathes more easily, an gradually becomes quite happy, for the water is calm on th surface, and of the warmth and color of tepid *café au lait*, qui a refreshing coolness after the tropical air, and he watches wi pleasure the rosy haze deepening into purple without losing i transparency. They pass sea-gulls fighting over the dead fi which Matt left behind, and which have been carried ahead him in their unresisting course.

"We're drifting powerful from them thar coats," grumbl David. "'Twill be a tiresome walk back. If it warn't f them we could cut across country when we make port."

Matt strains his vision to the left, but sees only the purp outline of Five Islands, and in the far background the fai peaks of the Cobequid Hills.

"Waal, I'm darned!" exclaims his father, suddenly. " them thar coats ain't comin' to meet us, it's a pity."

And presently, sure enough, Matt catches sight of the coa hastening along near the shore.

"We must cut 'em off afore they pass by," cries his fathe hilariously. "Spurt, sonny, spurt. 'Tis a race 'twixt them and us

Sea-birds begin to circle low over their heads, scenting David fish; but he pushes steadily on, animating his son with playf racing cries.

"We oughter back the coats," he observes. "They've backed us many a time. Just a leetle quicker," he says, at last, "or they'll git past yonder p'int, and then they're off to Truro."

Matt kicks out more lustily, then his heart almost stops as he suddenly sees Death beneath the lovely purple haze. It is the human swimmers who are in danger of being carried off to Truro if they do not make the shore earlier than "yonder p'int," for Matt remembers all at once that it is the last point for miles, the shore curving deeply inward. Even if they reach the point in time, they will be thrown back by the centrifugal swirl; they must touch the shore earlier to get in safely. He perceives his father has been aware of the danger from the start, and has been disguising his anxiety under the pretext of racing the coats. He feels proud of this strong, brave man, the cold terror passes from his limbs, and he spurts bravely.

"That's a little man," says David; "we'll catch 'em yet. Lucky it's sandstone yonder 'stead o' sand—no fear o' gettin' sucked in."

Now it is the shore that seems racing to meet them—the red reef sticks out a friendly finger, and in another five minutes they are perched upon it, like Gulliver on the Brobdingnagian's thumb; and what is more, they tie with their coats, meeting them just at the landing-place.

David laughs a long Homeric laugh at the queerness of the incident, quivering like a dog that shakes himself after a swim, and Matt smiles too.

"Them thar sea-birds air a bit off their feed, that's a fact," chuckles David, as he surveys his fish; and then the two cut across the forest, drying and steaming in the sun, the elder exhorting the younger to silence, and hiding the prongless pitch-forks in the hay-mow before they enter the house, all smiles and salmon.

At the early tea-supper they sit in dual isolation at one end of the table, their chairs close. But lo! Mrs. Strang, passing the hot flapjacks, or "corn-dodgers," with the superfluous perambulations of an excitable temperament, brushes the back of her hand against Matt's shoulder starts, pauses, and brushes it with her palm.

"Why, the boy's wringin' wet!" she cries.

"We went wadin'," David reminds her, meekly.

"Yes, but you don't wade on your heads," she retorts.

"I sorter tumbled," Matt puts in, anxious to exonerate his father.

Mrs. Strang passes her hand down her husband's jacket.

"An' father kinder stooped to pick me up," adds Matt.

"You're a nice Moloch to trust with one's children!" she exclaims in terrible accents.

David shrinks before the blaze of her eyes, almost feeling his coat drying under it.

"An' when you kin't manage to drownd 'em you try to kill 'em with rheumatics, and then *I* hev all the responsibility. It's 'nough to make a body throw up the position. Take off your clothes, both o' you."

Both of them look at each other, feeling vaguely the indelicacy of stripping at table. They put their hands to their jackets as if to compromise, then a simultaneous recollection crimsons their faces — their shirt-sleeves are gone. So David rises solemnly and leads the way up-stairs, and Matt follows, and Mrs. Strang's voice brings up the rear, and goes with them into the bedroom, stinging and excoriating. They shut the door, but it comes through the key-hole and winds itself about their naked limbs (Mrs. Strang distributing flapjacks to her brood all the while); and David, biting his lips to block the muzzle of his oath-repeater—for he never swears before mother and the children except when he is not angry—suddenly remembers that if he is to join his ship at St. John's by Thursday he must take the packet from Partridge Island to-morrow. His honey-moon is over; he has this honey-moon every two or three years, and his beautiful beloved is all amorousness and amiability, and the best room with the cane-bottomed chairs is thrown open for occupation; but after a few weeks Mrs. Strang is repossessed of her demon, and then it is David who throws up the position, and goes down to the sea in a ship, and does more business—of a mysterious sort—in the great waters. And so on the morrow of the adventure he kisses his bairns and his wife—all amorousness and amiability again—and passes with

wavings of his stick along the dusty road, under the red hemlocks, over the brow of the hill, and so—into the great Beyond. Passes, and with him all that savor of strange, romantic seas, all that flavor of bustling, foreign ports, that he brings to the lonely farm, and that cling about it even in his absence, exhaling from envelopes with picturesque stamps and letters with exotic headings; passes, narrowing the universe for his little ones, and making their own bit of soil sterner and their winter colder. He is dead, this brawny, sun-tanned father, incredibly dead, and the dead face haunts Matt—no vaporous mask, but stonily substantial, bobbing grewsomely in a green, sickly light, fathoms down, with froth on its lips, and slimy things of the sea twining in its hair. He looks questioningly at his own face in the fragment of mirror, trying to realize that it, too, will undergo petrifaction, and wondering how and when. He looks at his mother's face furtively, and wonders if the volcano beneath it will ever really sleep; he pictures her rigid underground, the long, black eyelashes neatly drawn down, and is momentarily pleased with the piquant contrast they make with the waxen skin. Is it possible the freshness and beauty of Harriet's face can decay too? Can Billy sink to a painless rest, with his leg perhaps growing straight again? Ah! mayhap in Billy's case Death were no such grisly mystery.

Morbid thoughts enough for a boy who should be profiting by the goodness of the northwester towards boykind. But even before this greater tragedy last year's accident had taken the zest out of Matt's enjoyment of the ice; in former good years he had been the first to cut fancy figures on the ponds and frozen marshes, or to coast down the slopes in a barrel-stave fitted with an upright and a cross-piece—a machine of his own invention worthy of the race of craftsmen from which he sprang. But this year the glow of the skater's blood became the heat of remorse when he saw or remembered Billy's wistful eyes; he gave up skating and contented himself with modelling the annual man of snow for the school at Cobequid Village.

In the which far-straggling village (to take time a little by the forelock) his father's death did not remain a wonder for the proverbial nine days. For a week the young men chewing their

evening quid round the glowing maple-wood of the store stove, or on milder nights tapping their toes under the verandas of the one village road as they gazed up vacantly at the female shadows flitting across the gabled dormer-windows of the snow-roofed wooden houses, spoke in their slightly nasal accent (with an emphasis on the "r") of the "pear'ls of the watter," and calling for their night's letters held converse with the postmistress on "the watter and its pear'ls," and expectorated copiously, presumably in lieu of weeping. And the outlying farmers who dashed up with a lively jingle of sleigh-bells to tether their horses to the hitching-posts outside the stores, or to the picket-fence surrounding the little wooden meeting-house (for the most combined business with religion), were regaled with the news ere they had finished swathing their beasts in their buffalo robes and "boots"; and it lent an added solemnity to the appeal of the little snow-crusted spire standing out ghostly against the indigo sky, and of the frosty windows glowing mystically with blood in the gleam of the chandelier lamps, and, mayhap, wrought more than the drawling exposition of the fusty, frock-coated minister. And the old grannies, smoking their clay pipes as they crouched nid-nodding over the winter hearth, their wizened faces ruddy with firelight, mumbled and grunted contentedly over the tidbit, and sighed through snuff-clogged nostrils as they spread their gnarled, skinny hands to the dancing, balsamic blaze. But after everybody had mourned and moralized and expectorated for seven days a new death came to oust David Strang's from popular favor; a death which had not only novelty, but equal sensationalism, combined with a more genuinely local tang, for it involved a funeral at home. Handsome Susan Hailey, driving her horses recklessly, her black feather waving gallantly in the wind, had dashed her sleigh upon a trunk, uprooted by the storm and hidden by the snow. She was flung forward, her head striking the tree, so that the brave feather dribbled blood, while the horses bolted off to Cobequid Village to bear the tragic news in the empty sleigh. And so the young men, with the carbuncles of tobacco in their cheek, expectorated more and spoke of the "pear'ls of the land," and walking home from the singing-class the sopranos discussed it

with the basses, and in the sewing-circles, where the matrons met to make undergarments for the heathen, there was much shaking of the head, with retrospective prophesyings and whispers of drink, and commiseration for "Ole Hey," and all the adjacent villages went to the sermon at the house, the deceased lady being, as the minister (to whose salary she annually contributed two kegs of rum) remarked in his nasal address, "universally respected." And everybody, including the Strangs and their collie, went on to the lonesome graveyard—some on horse and some on foot and some in sleighs, the coffin leading the way in a pung, or long box-sleigh—a far-stretching, black, nondescript procession, crawling dismally over the white, moaning landscape, between the zigzag ridges of snow marking the buried fences, past the trailing disconsolate firs, and under the white funereal plumes of the pines.

CHAPTER III

THE THOUGHTS OF YOUTH

Other rumors, too, came by coach to the village—rumors of blizzard and shipwreck—each with its opportunities of exhortation and expectoration. But in the lonely forest home, past which the dazzling mail-coach rattled with only a blast on the horn, the tragic end of David Strang stood out in equal loneliness. For Death, when he smites the poor, often cuts off not only the beloved, but the bread-winner; and though, in a literal sense, the Strangs made their own bread, yet it was David who kept the roof over their head and the ground under their feet. But for his remittances the interest on the mortgage, under which they held the farm and the house, could not have been paid, for the produce of the clearing, the bit of buckwheat and barley, barely maintained the cultivators, both Harriet and Matt eking out the resources of the family by earning a little in kind, sometimes even in money. Matt was a skilful soapmaker, decorating his bars with fanciful devices; and he delighted in

"sugaring"—a poetic process involving a temporary residence in a log-hut or a lumberman's cabin in the heart of the forest.

Now that the overdue mortgage money had gone to the bottom of the sea, more money must be raised immediately. That the dead man had any claim upon the consideration of his employers did not occur to the bereaved family; rather, it seemed, he owed the owners compensation for the lost *Sally Bell.* A family council was held on the evening of the day so blackly begun. Not even the baby was excluded—it sat before the open-doored stove on its mother's lap and crowed at the great burning logs that silhouetted the walls with leaping shadows. Sprat, too, was present, crouched on "Matt's mat" (as the children called the rag mat their brother had braided), thrusting forward his black muzzle when the door rattled with special violence, and by his side lay the boy staring into the tumbling flames, yet taking the lead in the council with a new authoritative ring in his voice.

Wherever the realities of life beleaguer the soul, there children are born serious, and experience soon puts an old head on young shoulders. The beady-eyed pappoose that the Indian squaw carries sandwichwise 'twixt back and board does not cry. Dump it down, and it stands stolid like a pawn on a chess-board. Hang it on a projecting knot in the props of a wigwam, and it sways like a snared rabbit. Matt Strang, strenuous little soul, had always a gravity beyond his years: his father's removal seemed to equal his years to his gravity. He knew himself the head of the house. Harriet, despite her superior summers, was of the wrong sex, and his mother, though she had physical force to back her, was not a reasoning being. For a time, no doubt, she would be quieted by the peace of the grave which all but the crowing infant felt solemnizing the household, but Matt had no hope of more than a truce.

It was the boy's brain and the boy's voice that prevailed at the council-fire. Daisy was to be killed and salted down and sold—fortunately she was getting on in years, and, besides, they could never have had the heart to eat their poor old friend themselves, with her affectionate old nose and her faithful udders. The calves were to become veal, and all this meat,

together with the fodder thus set free, Deacon Hailey was to be besought to take at a valuation, in lieu of the mortgage money, for money itself could not be hoped for from Cobequid Village. Though the "almighty dollar" ruled here as elsewhere, it was an unseen monarch, whose imperial court was at Halifax. There Matt might have got current coin, here barter was all the vogue. Accounts were kept in English money; it was not till a few years later that the dollar became the standard coin. For their own eating Matt calculated that he would catch more rabbits and shoot more partridges than in years of yore, and in the summer he would work on neighboring farms. Harriet would have to extend her sewing practice, and collaborate with Matt in making shad-nets for the fishermen, and Mrs. Strang would get spinning jobs from the farmers' wives. Which being settled with a definiteness that left even a balance of savings, the widow handed the infant in her arms to Harriet, and, replacing it by the big Bible, she slipped on her spectacles with a nervous, involuntary glance round the kitchen, and asked the six-year-old Teddy to stick a finger into the book. Opening the holy tome at that place, she began to read from the head to the end of the chapter in a solemn, prophetic voice that suited with her black cap pinched up at the edges. She had no choice of texts; pricking was her invariable procedure when she felt a call to prelection, and the issue was an uncertainty dubiously delightful; for one day there would be a story or a miracle to stir the children's blood, and another day a bald genealogy, and a third day a chapter of Revelation, all read with equal reverence as equally inspiring parts of an equally inspired whole.

Matt breathed freely when his mother announced Ezra, chap. x., not because he had any interest in Ezra, but because he knew it was a pictureless portion. When the text was liable to be interrupted by illustrations, the reading was liable to be interrupted by remonstrances, for scarce a picture but bore the marks of his illuminating brush, and his rude palette of ground charcoal, chalk, and berry-juice. He had been prompted to color before his hand itched to imitate, and in later years these episodes of the far East had found their way to planed boards of Western pine, with the figures often in new experimental

combinations, and these scenes were in their turn planed away to make room for others equally unsatisfactory to the critical artist. But his mother had never been able to forgive the iniquities of his prime, not even after she had executed vengeance on the sinner. She had brought the sacred volume from her home at Halifax, and a colored Bible she had never seen; color made religion cheerful, destroyed its essential austerity — it could no more be conceived apart from black and white than a minister of the Gospel. An especial grievance hovered about the early chapters of Exodus, for Matt had stained the Red Sea with the reddish hue of the Bay of Fundy—a sacrilege to his mother, to whose fervid imagination the Sea of Miracles loomed lurid with sacred sanguineousness to which no profane water offered any parallel.

But Ezra is far from Exodus, and to-night the reminder was not likely. A gleam of exaltation illumined the reader's eyes when she read the first verse; at the second her face seemed to flush as if the firelight had shot up suddenly.

"'Now when Ezra hed prayed an' when he hed confessed, weepin' an' castin' himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: fur the people wept very sore.

"'An' Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered an' said unto Ezra, We hev trespassed against our God, an' hev taken strange wives of the people of the land. . . .'"

She read on, pausing only at the ends of the verses. Harriet knitted stockings over baby's head; the smaller children listened in awe. Matt's thoughts soon passed from Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel, uninterested even by his relationship to Elam. Usually when the subject-matter was dull, and when he was tired of watching the wavering shadows on the gray-plastered walls, he got up a factitious interest by noting the initial letter of each verse and timing its length, in view of his Sunday-school task of memorizing for each week a verse beginning with some specified letter. His verbal memory being indifferent, he would spend hours in searching for the tiniest verse, wasting thereby an amount of time in which he could have overcome

the longest; though, as he indirectly scanned great tracts of the Bible, it may be this A B C business was but the device of a crafty deacon skilled in the young idea. However this be, Matt's mind was deeplier moved to-night. The shriek of the blind wind without contrasted with the cheerful crackle of the logs within, and the woful contrast brought up that weird image destined to haunt him for so long.

He shuddered to think of it—down there in the cold, excluded forever from the warm hearth of life. Was not that its voice in the wind—wailing, crying to be let in, shaking the door? His eyes filled with tears. Vaguely he heard his mother's voice intoning solemnly.

"'An' of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. An' of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, an' Elijah, an' Shemaiah, an' Jehiel, an' Uzziah. An' of the sons of Pashur. . . .' "

The baby was still smiling, and tangling Harriet's knitting, but Billy had fallen asleep, and presently Matt found himself studying the flicker of the firelight upon the little cripple's pinched face.

"'An' of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, an' Jeremoth, an' Zabad, an' Aziza. Of the sons also of Bebai. . . .' "

The prophetic voice rose and fell unwaveringly, unwearyingly.

"Don't you think I ought to write and tell Uncle Matt?" came suddenly from the brooding boy's lips.

"Silence, you son of Belial!" cried his mother indignantly. "How dare you interrupt the chapter, so near the end, too! Uncle Matt, indeed! What's the mortal use of writin' to him, I should like to know? Do you think he's likely to repent any, to disgorge our land? Why, he don't deserve to know his brother's dead, the everlastin' Barabbas. If he'd hed to do o' me he wouldn't hev found it so easy to make away with our inheritance, I do allow, and my poor David would hev been alive, and to home here with us to-night, thet's a fact. Christ hev mercy on us all." She burst into tears, blistering the precious page. Harriet ceased to ply her needles; they seemed to be going through her bosom. The baby enjoyed a free hand with

the wool. Billy slept on. Presently Mrs. Strang choked back her sobs, wiped her eyes, and resumed in a steady, reverential voice:

"'Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azareel, an' Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, an' Joseph. Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, an' Joel, Benaiah.

"'All these hed taken strange wives, an' some of them hed wives by whom they hed children.'"

Her voice fell with the well-known droop that marked the close. "Anyways," she added, "I don't know your uncle's address. London is a big place—considerable bigger nor Halifax; an' he'll allow we want to beg of him. Never!" She shut the book with an emphatic bang, and Matt rose from Sprat's side and put it away.

"Of course, I sha'n't go back to school any more," he said, lightly, remembering the point had not come up.

"Oh yes, you will." His mother's first instinct was always of contradiction.

"I may get a job an' raise a little money towards the mortgage."

"What job kin you get in the winter?"

"Why, I kin winnow wheat some," he reminded her, "an' chop the neighbors' wood, an' sort the vegetables in their cellars."

"An' whatever you make by thet," she reminded him, "you'll overbalance by what you'd be givin' away to the school-master. You've paid Alic McTavit to the end o' the season."

"I guess you're off the track this load o' poles, mother," said Matt, amused by her muddled finance.

Yet it was the less logical if even more specious argument of completing the snow months (for only young and useless children went to school in the summer) that appealed to him. The human mind is strangely under the sway of times and seasons, and the calendar is the stanchest ally of sloth and procrastination, and so Mrs. Strang settled in temporary triumph to her task of making new black mourning dresses for the girls out of her old merino, and a few days afterwards, when Matt had carried

out his financial programme satisfactorily (except that Deacon Hailey's valuation did not afford the estimated surplus), he joined the other children in their pilgrimage schoolward. The young Strangs amounted to a procession. At its head came Matt, drawing Billy on a little hand-sled by a breast-rope that came through the auger-holes in the peaks of the runners, and the end of Sprat, who sneaked after the children, formed a literal tail to it, till, arriving too far to be driven back, the animal ran to the front in fearless gambollings. This morning the air was keen and bright, the absence of wind preventing the real temperature from being felt, and the sun lit up the white woods with cold sparkle. Ere the children had covered the two miles most of them conceived such a new appetite that their fingers itched to undo their lunch packets. A halt was called, the bread-and-molasses was unwrapped, and while the future was being recklessly sacrificed to the present by the younger savages, Matt edified them by drawing on the snow with the point of Billy's crutch. They followed the development of these designs with vociferous anticipation, one shouting, "A cow," and another "Ole Hey" before more than a curve was outlined. Matt always amused himself by commencing at the most unlikely part of the figure, and working round gradually in unexpected ways, so as to keep the secret to the last possible moment. Sometimes, when it had been guessed too early, he would contrive to convert a fox into a moose, his enjoyment of his dexterity countervailing the twinge of his conscience. To-day all the animals were tamer than usual. The boy drew listlessly, abstractedly, unresentful when his secret was guessed in the first stages. And at last, half of itself, the crutch began to shape a Face—a Face with shut eyes and dripping hair, indefinably uncanny.

"Father!" cried Ted, in thick, triumphant tones, exultation tempered by mastication. But the older children held their breath, and Teddy's exclamation was succeeded by an awesome silence. Suddenly a sagging bough snapped and fell, the collie howled, and Matt, roused from his reverie, saw that Billy's face had grown white as the dead snow. The child was palsied with terror; Matt feared one of his fits was coming on. In a

frenzy of remorse he blurred out the face with the crutch, and hustled the sled forward, singing cheerily :

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity,
And suffer me to come to Thee."

The children took up the burden, sifting themselves instinctively into trebles and seconds in a harmony loud enough to rouse the hibernating bear. Billy's face returned to its normal pallor, and Matt's to its abstraction.

In the school-room—a bare, plastered room, cold and uninviting, with a crowd of boys and girls at its notched pine desks —he continued pensive. There was nothing to distract his abstraction, for even Ruth Hailey was away. The geography lesson roused him to a temporary attention. London flitted across his dreams—the Halifax of England, that mighty city in which pictures were saleable for actual coin, and a mighty picture-maker, the Matt Strang of England, was paid for play as if for work. But the reading-book, with its *menu* of solid stories and essays, peppered with religious texts, restored him to his reveries. McTavit, who was shaping quills with his knife, called upon him to commence the chapter ; but he stared at the little pedagogue blankly, unaware of the call. He was noting dreamily how his jagged teeth showed beneath the thin, snuffy upper lip, and the trick the mouth had of remaining wide open after it had ceased talking. He tried to analyze why McTavit was not smiling. Months ago, seeking to make his figures smile, the boy had discovered the rident effect of a wide mouth, and now he essayed to analyze the subtle muscular movements that separate the sublime from the ridiculous. Suddenly the haunting thought recurred to him with a new application. Even McTavit's freckled face would one day be frozen—those twitching eyelids still, the thin wide lips shut forever. How long more would he stride about his motley school-room, scattering blows and information ? Would he come to a stop in the school-room as the clock sometimes did, grown suddenly silent, its oil congealed by the intense cold ? Or would Death find

him in bed, ready stretched? And the restless boys and girls around him—good God!—they, too, would one day be very peaceful—mere blocks—Carroty Kitty, who was pinching Amy Warren's arm, and Peter Besant, who was throwing those pellets of bread, and even Simon the Sneak's wagging tongue would be still as a plummet. They would all grow rigid alike, not all at once, nor in one way, but some very soon, perhaps, and others when they were grown tall, and yet others when they were bent and grizzled; some on sea and some on land, some in this part of the map and some in that, some peacefully, some in pain; petrified one by one, ruthlessly, remorselessly, impartially; till at last all the busy hubbub was hushed, and of all that lively crew of youngsters not one was left to feel the sun and the rain. The pity of it thrilled him; even McTavit's freckled face grew softer through the veil of mist. Then, as his vision cleared, he saw the face was really darker: strange emotions seemed to agitate it.

"So ye're obstinate, are ye?" it screamed, with startling suddenness. At the same instant something shining flew through the air, and, whizzing past Matt's ear, sent back a little thud from behind. Matt turned his head in astonishment, and saw a penknife quivering in the wall. He turned back in fresh surprise, and saw that McTavit's face had changed, lobster-like, from black to red, as its owner realized how near had been Matt's (and his own) escape.

"Eh, awake at last, sleepy-head," he blustered. "There's na gettin' your attention. Well, what are ye starin' at? Are ye na goin' to fetch me my knife?"

"I'm not a dog," answered Matt, sullenly.

"Then dinna bark! Ye think because ye've lost your father ye're preevileged — to lose your manners," he added, with an epigrammatic afterthought that mollified him more than an apology. "I'm verra obleeged to you," he concluded, with elaborate emphasis, as Simon the Sneak handed him the knife.

"Now, then, sleepy-head," he said again, "p'r'aps ye'll read your paragraph—that's richt, Simon; show him the place."

McTavit hailed from Cape Breton Isle, and was popularly supposed to soliloquize in Gaelic. This hurt him when he pro-

posed to the postmistress, who had been to boarding-school in Truro. She declared she would not have a man who did not speak good English.

"I do speak guid English," he protested, passionately. "Mebbe not in the school-room, when I'm talkin' only to my pupils, and it dinna matter, but in private and in society I'm most parteecular."

McTavit was still a bachelor, and still spoke guid English. When the reading-lesson had come to an end, Matt was left again to his own thoughts, for while poor McTavit gave the juniors an exercise in grammar which they alleviated by gum-chewing, Matt and a few other pupils were allotted the tranquillizing task of multiplying in copy-books £3949 17*s.* 11¾*d.* by 7958. The sums were so colossal that Matt wondered whether they existed in the world; and if so, how many pictures it would be necessary to make to obtain them. An awful silence brooded over the room, for when written exercises were on, the pupils took care to do their talking silently, lest they should be suspected of copying, this being what they were doing. There was a little museum case behind McTavit's desk, containing stuffed skunks and other animals and local minerals lovingly collected by him—stilbite and heulandite and quartz and amethyst and spar and bits of jasper and curiously clouded agate, picked up near Cape Blomidon amid the débris of crumbling cliffs. At such times McTavit would stand absorbed in the contemplation of his treasures, his rod carelessly tucked under his arm, as one "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." Then the tension of silence became positively painful, for the school-room had long since discovered that the museum case was a reflector, and McTavit, though he prided himself on the secret of his Argus eye, never caught any but novices not yet initiated into the traditions. Imagine, therefore, the shock both to him and the room, when to-day the acute stillness was broken by a loud cry of "Bang! bang! bang!" An irresistible guffaw swept over the school, and under cover of the laughter the cute and ready collogued as to "answers."

"Silence!" thundered McTavit. "Who was that?"

In the even more poignant silence of reaction a small still voice was heard.

"Please, sir, it was me," said Matt, remorsefully.

"Oh, it was you, was it? Then here's bang! bang! bang! for ye." And as he spoke the angry little man accentuated each "bang" with a vicious thwack. Then his eye caught sight of Matt's copy-book. In lieu of ranged columns of figures was a rough pen-and-ink sketch of a line of great war-ships overhung by smoke-clouds, and apparently converging all their batteries against one little ship, on whose deck a stalwart man stood solitary, wrapped in a flag.

McTavit choked with added rage.

"D-defacin' your books agen. What—what d'ye call that?" he spluttered.

"Blockade," said Matt, sulkily.

"Blockhead!" echoed McTavit, and was so pleased with the universal guffaw (whereof the cute and ready took advantage to compare notes as before) that he contented himself with the one slash that was necessary to drive the jest home. But it was one slash too much. Matt's vocal cannonade had been purely involuntary, but he was willing to suffer for his over-vivid imagination. The last insult, however—subtly felt as an injury to his dead father, too—set his blood on fire. He suddenly remembered that this blockhead was, at any rate, the "head" of a family; that he could no longer afford to be degraded before the little ones, who were looking on with pain and awe. He rose and walked towards the door.

"Where are ye goin'?" cried McTavit.

"To find Captain Kidd's treasure. I've learned all I want to know," said Matt.

"Ye'd better come back."

Matt turned, walked back to his seat, possessed himself of his half-empty copy-book, and walked to the door.

"Good-bye, you fellers," he said, cheerfully, as he passed out. The girls he ignored.

McTavit gave chase with raised rod, regardless of the pandemonium that rose up in his wake. Matt was walking slowly across the field, with Sprat leaping up to lick his face. The dog had rejoined him. McTavit went back, his rod hanging down behind.

Matt walked on sadly, his blood cooled by the sharp air. Another link with the past was broken forever. He looked back at the simple wooden school-house, with the ensign of smoke fluttering above its pitched roof; kinder memories of McTavit surged at his heart—his little jests at the expense of the boys, his occasional reminiscences of his native Cape Breton and of St. John, New Brunswick, with its mighty cathedral, the *Life of Napoleon* he had lent him last year, his prowess with line and hook the summer he boarded with the Strangs in lieu of school-fees, and then—with a sudden flash—came the crowning recollection of his talent for cutting turreted castles, and tigers, and anything you pleased, out of the close-grained biscuits and the chunks of buckwheat-cake the children brought for lunch. Matt's thoughts went back to the beginnings of his school career, when McTavit had spurred him on to master the alphabet by transforming his buckwheat-cake into any animal from ass to zebra. He remembered the joy with which he had ordered and eaten his first elephant. Pausing a moment to cut a stick and drive Sprat off with it, he walked back into the wondering school-room.

"Please, sir, I'm sorry I went away so rudely," he said, "and I've cut you a new birch rod."

McTavit was touched.

"Thank you," he said, simply, as he took it. "What's the matter?" he roared, seeing Simon the Sneak's hand go up.

"Please, sir, hedn't you better try if he hesn't split it and put a hair in?"

"Grand idea!" yelled McTavit, grimly. "How's that?"

And the new birch rod made its trial slash at the raised hand.

CHAPTER IV

"MAN PROPOSES"

Mrs. Strang was busy in Deacon Hailey's kitchen. The providential death of Mrs. Hailey had given her chores to do at the homestead; for female servants—or even male—were scarce in the colony, and Ruth had been brought up by her mother to play on the harpsichord.

When Mrs. Strang got home after a three-mile walk, sometimes through sleet and slush, she would walk up and down till the small hours, spinning carded wool into yarn at her great uncouth wheel, and weeping automatically at her loneliness, reft even of the occasional husband for whom she had forsaken the great naval city of her girlhood, the beautiful century-old capital. "It's 'nough to make a body throw up the position," she would cry hysterically to the deaf rafters when the children were asleep and only the wind was awake. But the droning wheel went round just the same, steady as the wheel of time (Mrs. Strang moving to and fro like a shuttle), till the task was completed, and morning often found her ill-rested and fractious and lachrymose. Matt would have pitied her more if she had pitied herself less. In the outside world, however, she had no airs of martyrdom, bearing herself genially and independently. At the "revivals" held in private houses she was an important sinful figure, though neither Harriet nor Matt had yet found grace or membership. She smiled a pleasant response to-night when Deacon Hailey came in from the tannery and said "Good-even-in'." It was a large, low kitchen, heated by an American stove, with a gleaming dresser and black wooden beams, from which hams hung. The deacon felt more comfortable there than in the room in which Ruth was at that moment engaged in tink-

ling the harpsichord, a room that contained other archaic heirlooms: old china, a tapestry screen, scriptural mottoes worked in ancestral hair, and a large colored lithograph of the Ark on Mount Ararat, for refusing to come away from which Matt had once been clouted by his mother before all the neighbors. The house was, indeed, uncommonly luxurious, sheltered by double doors and windows, and warmly wrapped in its winter cincture of tan-bark.

"An' how's Billy?" asked the deacon. "Some folks 'ud say how's Billy's mother, but thet I can see fur myself—rael bonny and han'sum, thet's a fact. It's sick folk es a Christian should inquire arter, hey?"

"Billy's jest the same," replied Mrs. Strang, her handsome face clouding.

"No more fits, hey?"

"No; not for a long time, thank God. But he'll never be straight again."

"Ah, Mrs. Strang, we're all crooked somehow. 'Tis the Lord's will, you may depend. Since my poor Susan was took, my heart's all torn and mangled; my heartstrings kinder twisted 'bout her grave. Ah! never kin I forgit her. Love is love, I allus thinks. My time was spent so happy, plannin' how to make her happy—for 'tis only in makin' others happy that we git happy ourselves, hey? Now I hev no wife to devote myself to my han's are empty. I go 'bout lookin' everyways fur Sunday."

"Oh, but I'm sure you've never got a minute to spare."

"You may depend," said the deacon, proudly. "If I ain't 'tarnally busy what with the tannery an' the grist-mill an' the farm an' the local mail, it's a pity. I don't believe in neglectin' dooty because your heart's bustin' within." He spat sorrowfully under the stove. "My motto is, 'Take kear o' the minutes, and the holidays 'll take kear o' themselves.' A man hes no time to waste in this oncivilized Province, where stinkin' Indians, that never cleared an acre in their lazy lives, hev the right to encamp on a man's land, an' cut down his best firs an' ashes fur their butter-butts and baskets, and then hev the imperence to want to swop the identical same for your terbacco. It's

thievin', I allus thinks; right-down breakin' o' the Commandments, hey?"

"Well, what kin you expec' from Papists?" replied Mrs. Strang. "Why, fur sixpence the holy fathers forgive 'em all their sins."

"'Tain't often they've got sixpence, hey? When 'lection-day comes round agen I won't vote fur no candidate that don't promise to coop all them greasy Micmacs up in a reservation, same es they do to Newfoundland. They're not fit to mix with hard-workin' Christian folk. Them thar kids o' yourn, now, I hope they're proper industrious. A child kin't begin too airly to larn field-work, hey?"

"Ah, they're the best children in the world," said Mrs. Strang. "They'll do anythin' an' eat anythin' e'en a'most, an' never a crost word; thet's a fact."

The deacon suppressed a smile of self-gratulation. Labor was scarcer than ever that year, and in his idea of marrying Harriet Strang, which he was now cautiously about to broach, the possibility of securing the gratuitous services of the elder children counted not a little, enhancing the beauty of his prospective bride. He replied, feelingly:

"I'm everlastin' glad to hear it, Mrs. Strang, for I know you kin't afford t' employ outside labor. They're goin' to arx three shillin's a day this summer, the blood-suckers."

"The laborer is worthy of his hire," quoted Mrs. Strang.

"Yes; but he allus wants to be *highered*, hey? A seasonable joke ain't bad in its right place, I allus thinks. You needn't allus be pullin' a long face. Thet Matt of yourn, now, I've seen him with a face like ole Jupe's fiddle, and walkin' along es slow es a bark-mill turns a'most."

Mrs. Strang sighed.

"Ah, you're a good woman, Mrs. Strang. There's no call to blush, fur it's true. D'ye think Deacon Hailey hesn't got eyes for what's under his nose? The way you're bringing up them thar kids is a credit to the Province. I only hopes they'll be proper thankful fur it when they're growed up. It makes my heart bleed a'most, I do declare. Many a time I've said to myself, 'Deacon Hailey, 'tis your dooty to do somethin' fur them

thar orphans.' Many a time I've thought I'd take the elder ones off your han's. There's plenty o' room in the ole farm—'twere built for children, but there's on'y Ruth left. An' *she* isn't my own, though when you see a gal around from infancy you forgits you ain't the father, hey? What a pity poor Sophia's two boys were as delicate as herself."

"Sophia?" murmured Mrs. Strang, interrogatively.

"Thet was my fust wife afore you came to these parts. She died young, poor critter. Never shall I forgit her. Ah, there's nothin' like fust love, I allus thinks. If I hedn't wanted to hev children to work fur, I should never ha' married agen. But it's a selfish business, workin' for one's own han', I allus thinks, knowin' thet when you die all you've sweated fur 'll go to strangers. An' now thet I've on'y got one soul dependent on me, I feels teetotally onswoggled. What do you say? s'pose I relieve you of Matt—dooty don't end with passin' the bag round in church, hey?—it's on this airth that we're called upon to sacrifice ourselves—or better still—s'pose I take Harriet off your han's?"

Mrs. Strang answered, hesitatingly: "It is rael kind o' you, deacon. But, of course, Harriet couldn't live here with you."

"Hey? Why not?"

"She's too ole."

"An' how ole might she be?"

"Gittin' on for seventeen."

"I guess thet's not too ole for me," he said, with a guffaw.

Mrs. Strang paused, startled. The idea took away her breath. The deacon smiled on. In the embarrassing silence the tinkle of Ruth's harpsichord sounded like an orchestra.

"You—would—raelly—like my Harriet?" Mrs. Strang said, at last.

"You may depend—I've thought a good deal of her, a brisk an' handy young critter with no boardin'-school nonsense 'bout her." He worked his quid carefully into the other cheek, complacently enjoying Mrs. Strang's overwhelmed condition, presumably due to his condescension. "Of course there's heaps of han'sum gals every ways, but booty is only skin-deep, I allus thinks. She's very young, too, but thet's rather in her favor.

You can eddicate 'em if you take 'em young. Train up a *child*, hey?"

"But I'm afeared Harriet wouldn't give up Abner Preep," said Mrs. Strang, slowly. "She's the most obstinate gal, thet's a fact."

"Hey? She walks out with Abner Preep?"

"No—not thet! I've sot my face agin thet. But I know she wouldn't give him up, thet's sartin."

Ruth's harpsichord again possessed the silence, trilling forth "Doxology" with an unwarranted presto movement. Mrs. Strang went on: "The time o' your last muddin' frolic she danced with him all night e'en a'most and druv off home in his sleigh, an' there ain't a quiltin' party or a candy-pullin' or an infare but she contrives to meet him."

"Scendalous!" exclaimed the deacon.

"I don't see nothin' scendalous!" replied Mrs. Strang, indignantly. "The young man wants to marry her genu*ine*. 'Pears to me *your* darter is more scendalous a'most, playin' hymns as if they were hornpipes. I didn't arx my folks if I might meet my poor Davie; we went to dances and shows together, and me a Baptist, God forgive me! And Harriet's jest like that — the hussy—she takes arter her mother."

"But if you were to talk to her!" urged the deacon.

Mrs. Strang shook her head.

"She'd stab herself sooner."

"Stab herself sooner'n give up Abner Preep!"

"Sooner'n marry any one else."

The deacon paused to cut himself a wedge of tobacco imperturbably. There was no trace of his disappointment visible; with characteristic promptitude he was ready for the next best thing.

"Well, who wants her to marry anybody else?" he asked, raising his eyebrows. "*You* don't, do you?"

"N-n-o," gasped Mrs. Strang, purpling.

"Thet's right. Give her her head a bit. It don't do to tie a grown-up gal to her mammy's apron-strings. You may take a horse to the water, but you kin't make her drink, hey? No, no, don't you worry Harriet with forcin' husbands on her."

"I—I—kinder—thought—" gasped Mrs. Strang, looking handsomer than ever in the rosy glow of confusion.

"You kinder thought—" echoed Old Hey, spitting accurately under the stove.

"Thet you wanted Harriet—"

"Thet's so. I guessed she could live here more comfortable than to home. I don't ask no reward; 'the widder and the orphan,' as Scripter says—hey?"

"You didn't mean marriage?"

"Hey?" shouted the deacon. "Marriage? Me? Well, I swow! Me, whose Susan hes only been dead five months! A proper thing to suspec' me of! Why, all the neighbors 'ud be sayin', 'Susan is hardly cold in her grave afore he's thinkin' of another.'"

"I beg your pardin," said the abashed woman.

"An' well you may, I do declare! Five months arter the funeral, indeed! Why, ten months at least must elapse! But you teetotally mistook my meanin', Mrs. Strang; it's a woman *I'd* be wantin'—a woman with a heart an' a soul, not an unbroken filly. All I was a-thinkin' of was, Could thet thar Abner Preep clothe and feed your darter? But I ain't the man to bear malice; and till you kin feel you kin trust her to him or some other man, my house is open to her. I don't draw back my offer, and when I made it I was quite aware you would hev to be on the spot, too, to look arter her—hey?"

"Me?"

"Well, you're not too ole, anyways." And the deacon smiled again. "A'ready you're here all day e'en a'most." Here he half knelt down to attend to the stove, which was smoking very slightly. "It wouldn't be much of a change to sleep here, hey?"

"Oh, but you're forgittin' the other children, deacon."

"Deacon Hailey ain't the man to forgit anythin', I guess," he said, over his shoulder. "Afore he talks he thinks. He puts everythin' in the tan-pit an' lets it soak, hey? Is it likely I'd take you over here an' leave the little uns motherless? I never *did* like this kind of stove." He fidgeted impatiently with the mechanism at the back, making the iron rattle.

"I—I—don't—understand," faltered Mrs. Strang, her heart beginning to beat painfully.

"How you do go on ter-day, Mrs. Strang! When I ain't talkin' o' marriage you jump at it, and when I am you hang back like a mare afore a six-foot dyke. Ah! thet's better," and he adjusted the damper noisily, with a great sigh of satisfaction.

"You want to marry *me?*" gasped Mrs. Strang. The dark, handsome features flushed yet deeper; her bosom heaved.

"You've struck it! I do want ter, thet's plain!" He rose to his feet, and threw his head back and his chest forward. "You'll allus find me straightforward, Mrs. Strang. I don't beat about the bush, hey? But I shouldn't hev spoke so prematoor if you hedn't druv me to it by your mistake 'bout Harriet. Es if I could marry a giddy young gal with her head full o' worldly thoughts! Surely you must hev seen how happy I've been to hev you here, arnin' money to pay off your mortgage. Not that I'd a-called it in anyways! What's thet thar little sum to me? But I was thinkin' o' *your* feelin's; how onhappy you would be to owe me the money. And then thinkin' how to do somethin' for your children, I saw it couldn't be done without takin' *you* into account. A mother clings to her children. Nater is nater, I allus thinks. And the more I took you into account, the more you figured up. There's a great mother, I thinks; there's a God-fearin' woman. An' a God-fearin' woman is a crown to her husban', hey? If ever I do bring myself to marry agen, thet's the woman for my money, I vow! When I say money, it's on'y speakin' in parables like, 'cause I'm not thet sort o' man. There *air* men as 'ud come to you an' say, 'See here, Mrs. Strang, I've got fifty acres of fust-class interval-land, an' a thousand acres of upland and forest-land, an' thirty head o' cattle, an' a hundred sheep a'most, an' a tannery thet, with the shoemaker's shop attached, brings me in two hundred pound a year, an' a grist-mill, an' I carry the local mail, an' I've shares and mortgages thet would make you open your eyes, I tell *you*, an' I'm free from encumbrances e'en a'most, whereas you've got half a dozen.' But what does Deacon Hailey say? He says, jest put all thet outer your mind, Mrs. Strang, an' think on'y

o' the *man*—think o' the man, with no one to devote himself to."

He took her hand, and she did not withdraw it. Emotion made her breathing difficult. In the new light in which he appeared to her she saw that he was still a proper man—straight and tall and sturdy and bright of eye, despite his grizzled beard and hair.

"An' if you kin't give him devotion in return, jest you say so plump; take a lesson from his straightforwardness, hey? Don't you think o' your mortgage, or his money-bags, 'cause money ain't happiness, hey? An' don't you go sacrificin' yourself for your children, thinkin' o' poor little Billy's future, 'cause I don't hold with folks sacrificin' themselves wholesale; self-preservation is the fust law of nater, hey? an' it wouldn't be fair to *me*. All ye hev to arx yourself is jest this: Kin you make Deacon Hailey happy in his declinin' years?" He drew himself up to his full height without letting go her hand, and his eyes looked into hers. "Yes, I say declinin' years—there's no deception, the 'taters air all up to sample. How ole might you think me?"

"Fifty," she said, politely.

"Nearer sixty!" he replied, triumphantly. "But I hev my cold bath every mornin'—I'm none o' your shaky boards that fly into etarnal bits at the fust clout, hey?"

"But you hev been married twice," she faltered.

"So will *you* be—when you marry me, hey?" And the deacon lifted her chin playfully. "We're neither on us rough timber—we've both hed our wainy edges knocked off, hey? My father hed three wives—and he's still hale and hearty—a widower o' ninety. Like father like son, hey? He's a deacon, too, down to Digby."

As Deacon Hailey spoke of his father he grew middle-aged to Mrs. Strang's vision. But she found nothing to reply, and her thoughts drifted off inconsequently on the rivulet of sacred music.

"But Ruth won't like it," she murmured at last.

"Hey? What's Ruth got to say in the matter? I guess Ruth knows her fifth commandment, an' so do I. My father is

the on'y person whose blessin' I shall arx on my 'spousals. I allus make a pint o' thet, you may depend."

The pathetic picture of Deacon Hailey beseeching his father's blessing knocked off ten years more from his age, and it was a young and ardent wooer whose grasp tightened momently on Mrs. Strang's hand.

"We might go to see him together," he said. "It's an everlastin' purty place, Digby."

"I'd rayther see Halifax," said Mrs. Strang, weakly. In the whirl of her thoughts Ruth's tinkling tune seemed the only steady thing in the universe. Oh, if Ruth would only play something bearing on the situation, so that Heaven might guide her in this sudden and fateful crisis!

"Halifax, too, some day," said the deacon, encouragingly, laying his disengaged hand caressingly on her hair. "We'll go to the circus together."

She withdrew herself spasmodically from his touch.

"Don't ask me!" she cried; "you're Presbyterian!"

"Well, and what was your last husban'?"

"Don't ask me. Harriet and Matt air ongodly 'nough as it is; they've neither on 'em found salvation."

"Well, I won't interfere with your doctrines, you bet. Freedom o' conscience, I allus thinks. We all sarve the same Maker, hey? I guess you're purty reg'lar at our church, though."

"Thet's God's punishment on me for runnin' away from Halifax, where I hed a church of my own to go to, but he never cared nuthin' 'bout the 'sential rite, my poor Davie. I ought to ha' been expelled from membership there and then, thet's a fact, but the elders were merciful. Sometimes I think 'tis the old French nater that makes me backslide; my grandfather came from Paris in 1783, at the end o' the Amur'can war, and settled to St. Margaret's Bay; but then he married into a godfearin' German family that emigrated there the same time a'most, and that ought to ha' made things straight agen."

Mrs. Strang talked on, glad to find herself floating away from the issue. But the deacon caught her by the hand again and hauled her back.

"There won't be no backslidin' in Deacon Hailey's house-

hold, you may depend," he said. "When a woman hes a godly stay-to-home husband, Satan takes to his heels. It's widders and grass-widders es he flirts with, hey?"

Mrs. Strang colored up again, and prayed silently for help from the harpsichord.

"I kin't give you an answer yet," she said, feebly.

Old Hey slowly squirted a stream of tobacco-juice into the air as imperturbably as a stone fountain figure.

"I don't want your answer yet. Didn't I tell you I couldn't dream of marryin' agen for ages? It don't matter *your* bein' in a hurry 'cause your pardner left you three years back, but I hev the morals o' the township to consider; it's our dooty in life to set a good example to the weaker brethren, I allus thinks. Eight months at least must elapse! I on'y spoke out now 'cause o' your onfortunate mistake 'bout Harriet, and all I want is to be sure thet when I do come to ask you in proper form and in doo course, you won't say 'no.'"

Mrs. Strang remained silent. And the harpsichord was silent too. Even that had deserted her; its sound might have been tortured into some applicability, but its silence could be construed into nothing, unless it was taken to give consent. And then all at once Ruth struck a new chord. Mrs. Strang strained her ears to catch the first bar. The deacon could not understand the sudden gleam that lit up her face when the instrument broke into the favorite Nova Scotian song, "The Vacant Chair!" At last Heaven had sent her a sign; there was a vacant chair, and it was her mission to fill it.

"Well, is thet a bargen?" asked the deacon, losing patience.

"If you're sure you want me," breathed Mrs. Strang.

In a flash the deacon's arms were round her and his lips on hers. She extricated herself almost as quickly by main force.

"'Twarn't to be yet," she cried, indignantly.

"Of course not, Mrs. Strang," retorted the deacon, severely. "On'y you asked if I was sure, and I allowed I'd show you Deacon Hailey was genu*ine*. It's sorter sealin' the bargen, hey? I couldn't let you depart in onsartinty."

"Well, behave yourself in future," she said, only half mollified, as she readjusted her hair, "or I'll throw up the position.

I guess I'll be off now," and she took bonnet and mantle from a peg.

"Not in anger, Mrs. Strang, I hope. 'Let all bitterness be put away from you,' hey? Thet thar han'sum face o' yourn warn't meant for thunder-clouds."

He hastened to help her on with her things, and in the process effected a reconciliation by speaking of new ones—"store clothes"—that would set off her beauty better. Mrs. Strang walked airily through the slushy forest road as on a primrose path. She was excited and radiant—her troubles were rolled away, and her own and her children's future assured, and Heaven itself had nodded assent. Her lonely heart was to know a lover's tenderness again; it was swelling now with gratitude that might well blossom into affection. How gay her home should be with festive companies, to be balanced by mammoth revivalist meetings! She would be the centre of hospitality and piety for the country-side.

But as she neared the house—which seemed to have run halfway to meet her—the primroses changed back to slush, and her face to its habitual gloom.

Matt and Harriet were alone in the kitchen. The girl was crocheting, the boy daubing flowers on a board, which he slid under the table as he heard his mother stamping off the wet snow in the passage. Mrs. Strang detected the board, but she contented herself by ordering him to go to bed. Then she warmed her frozen hands at the stove and relapsed into silence. Twenty times she opened her lips to address Harriet, but the words held back. She grew angry with her daughter at last.

"You're plaguy onsociable to-night, Harriet," she said, sharply.

"Me, mother?"

"Yes, you. You might tell a body the news."

"There's no news to Cobequid. Ole Jupe's come back from fiddlin' at a colored ball way down Hants County. He says two darkies hed a fight over the belle."

Harriet ceased, and her needles clicked on irritatingly. Mrs. Strang burst forth:

"You might ask a body the news."

"What news can there be down to Ole Hey's?" Harriet snapped.

"Deacon Hailey," began Mrs. Strang, curiously stung by the familiar nickname, and pricked by resentment into courage; then her voice failed, and she concluded, almost in a murmur, "is a-thinkin' of marryin' agen."

"The ole wretch!" ejaculated Harriet, calmly continuing her crocheting.

"He's not so ole!" expostulated Mrs. Strang, meekly.

"He's sixty! Why, *you* might as well think o' marryin'! The idea!"

"Oh, but I'm on'y thirty-five, Harriet!"

"Well, it's jest es ole. Love-makin' is on'y for the young."

"Thet's jest where you're wrong, Harriet. Youth is enjoyment enough of itself. It is the ole folks that hev nothin' else to look fur thet want to be loved. It's the on'y thing thet keeps 'em from throwin' up the position, an' *they* marry sensibly. Young folks oughter wait till they've got sense."

"The longer they wait the less sense they've got! If two people love each other they ought to marry at once, thet's a fact."

"Yes; if they're two ole sensible people."

"I'm tar'd o' this talk o' waitin'," said Harriet, petulantly. "How ole were you when you ran away with father?"

"You ondecent minx!" ejaculated Mrs. Strang.

"You weren't no older nor me," persisted Harriet, unabashed.

"Yes, but I lived in a great city. I saw young men of all shapes and sizes. I picked from the tree—I didn't take the fust thet fell at my feet; an' how you can look at an onsightly critter like Abner Preep! I'd raather see you matched with Roger Besant, for though his left shoulder *is* half an inch higher than the right a'most, from carrying heavy timbers in the shipyard, he don't bend his legs like a couple o' broken candles."

"Don't talk to me o' Roger Besant—he's a toad. It's Abner I love. I don't kear 'bout his legs; his heart's in the right place!"

"You mean he's give it to you!"

"I reckon so!"

"An' you will fly in my face?"

"I must," said Harriet, sullenly, "if you don't take your face out o' the way."

"You imperent slummix! An' you will leave your mother alone?"

"Es soon es Abner kin build a house."

"Then if you marry Abner Preep," said Mrs. Strang, rising in all the majesty of righteous menace, "I'll marry Deacon Hailey."

"What!" Harriet also rose, white and scared.

"You may depend! I'm desprit! You kin try me too far. You know the wust, now. I *will* take my face out o' the way, you onnatural darter! I will take it to one thet 'preciates it."

There was a painful silence. Mrs. Strang eyed her daughter nervously. Harriet seemed dazed.

"You'd marry Ole Hey?" she breathed at last.

"You'd marry young Preep!" retorted the mother

"I'm a young gal!"

"An' I'm an ole woman! Two ole folks is es good a match es two young uns."

"Ah, but you don't allow Abner and me *is* a good match!" said Harriet, eagerly.

"If you allow the deacon and me is."

Their eyes met.

"You see, there's the young uns to think on," said Mrs. Strang. "If you were to go away, how could I get along with the mortgage?"

"Thet's true," said Harriet, relenting a little.

"An' if we were all to go to the farm, there'd be the house for you and Abner."

Harriet flushed rosily.

"An' mebbe the deacon wouldn't be hard with the mortgage!"

"Mebbe," murmured Harriet. Her heart went pit-a-pat. But suddenly her face clouded.

"But what will Matt say?" she half whispered, as if afraid he might be within hearing. "I guess he'll be riled some."

"Oh, he'll be all right if you kinder break the news to him

an' explain the thing proper. I reckon he won't take to the deacon at first."

"The deacon! It's Abner I'm thinkin' on!"

"Abner! What does it matter what he thinks of Abner? 'Tain't es if Matt was older nor you. He's got nothin' to say in the matter, I do allow."

"But he calls him Bully Preep, and says he used to wallop him at McTavit's."

"And didn't he desarve it?" asked Mrs. Strang, indignantly.

"He says he won't hev him foolin' aroun'. He calls him a mean skunk."

"And who's Matt, I should like to know, to pass his opinions on his elders an' betters? You jest take no notice of his 'tarnation imperence and he'll dry up. It's hevin' a new father he'll be peaked about. Thet's why *you'd* better do the talkin' to Matt!"

"Then *you'll* hev to tell him 'bout Abner," bargained Harriet.

But neither had the courage.

CHAPTER V

PEGGY THE WATER-DRINKER

The old year had rolled off into the shadows, and the new had spun round as far as April. Spring came to earth for a few hours a day, and behind her Winter, whistling, clanged his iron gates, refreezing the morass to which she had reduced the roads. Even at noon there was no genial current in the air, unless you took the sheltered side of hills and trees, and found Spring nestling shyly in windless coverts, though many a se'nnight had still to pass ere, upon some more shaded hummock, the harbinger Mayflower would timidly put forth a white bud laden with delicate odor. Everywhere, down the hills and along the tracks, in every rut and hollow, the sun saw a thousand dancing rivulets gleam and run, and great freshets stir up the

sullen, ice-laden rivers to sweep away dams and mills, but the moon looked down on a white country demurely asleep.

Early in the month, Matt having previously said farewell in earnest to McTavit's school-room, left home for the spring sugaring. Billy, alas! could not accompany him as of yore, so Sprat was left behind, too, by way of compensation to Billy. For company and co-operation, Matt took with him an Indian boy whose Christian name (for he was a Roman Catholic) was Tommy.

Matt had picked up Tommy in the proximate woods, where the noble savage ran wild in cast-off Christian clothes. Tommy belonged to a tribe that had recently pitched its wigwams in the backlands, a mile from Cobequid Village. To Mrs. Strang, who despatched the sugaring expedition and provisioned it, he was merely "a filthy brat who grinned like a Chessy cat," but to Matt he incarnated the poetry of the primitive, and even spoke it. Not that Matt had more than a few words of Algonquinese, but Tommy broke English quite unhesitatingly; and his remarks, if terse and infrequent, were flowery and sometimes intelligible. They generally ran backward, after the manner of Micmac, which is as highly inflected as Greek or Hebrew. For the admiring Matt there was an atmosphere of romance about the red man which extended even to the red boy, and he had set himself to win Tommy's heart in exchange for tobacco, which was itself obtained by another piece of barter. Tommy smoked a clay pipe, being early indurated to hardship, after the Spartan custom of his tribe. There were sketches of Tommy, colored like the Red Sea or the Bay of Fundy, in Matt's secret gallery. Tommy was easy to do, owing to his other tribal habit of sitting silent for hours without moving a muscle. It was only rarely that Matt could extract from him native legends about Glooscap, the national hero, and Mundu, the devil.

The two boys set out together for a rock-maple district five miles off, drawing their impedimenta heaped high on a large sled. They were fortified for a three weeks' stay. Mrs. Strang had baked them several batches of bread, and with unwonted enthusiasm supplied them with corn-meal for porridge, and tea and sugar, and butter and molasses, and salt pork and beef, all

stowed into the barrel that would come home full of sugar. Their kitchen paraphernalia embraced a teapot and a teakettle, a frying-pan and a pot, while their manufacturing apparatus comprised tin pails, Yankee buckets, dippers, and axes. Guns, ammunition, and blankets completed their equipment. Matt's painting materials were stowed away on his person unobtrusively.

They took possession of a disused log-cabin, formerly the property of a woodsman, as the advertising agent would have put it, had he penetrated to the backwoods. Possibly under his roseate vision it might have expanded into a detached villa without basement, or a bungalow standing in its own grounds, but a non-professional eye would have seen nothing but four walls and a pitched roof with a great square hole in it to let the light in and the smoke out. These walls were built of unhewn logs in their rough, natural bark. The floor was even more primitive, being simply the soil. It was necessary to thaw it by lighting the fire on it before the stakes could be driven in to support the cross-pieces from which the sugar-pot depended.

Then the boys chopped down a vast store of hardwood for fuel, and lanced the tall maples, catching their blood in birch-bark troughs through pine spills. They emptied the troughs into pails, and carried the sap to their cabin, and boiled it in the big pot, and cooled it again to sugar. A halcyon fortnight passed, full of work, yet leaving Matt leisure for daubing boyish fancies on pieces of birch-bark to cover withal the wooden walls of his home, which the aforesaid advertiser might not unwarrantably have described as a studio with a novel top-light in a quiet neighborhood. Possibly Matt's mural decorations would have enhanced the description. They comprised a fantastic medley of angels with faces more or less like Ruth Hailey, and devils fashioned more or less after the similitude of Bully Preep, and strange composite animals more or less like nothing on earth, moving amid hills and ships and lurid horizons. One night Matt sat by the fire in the centre of the hut painting a more realistic picture and meditating a weeding of his gallery. There had been no sap running that day, a sudden return of winter had congealed it, and so this extra artistic output during

the comparatively idle hours had almost exhausted his hanging-space. While he painted he gave an eye to the seething pot in which the sap must change to molasses, and then thicken to maple syrup, and then to maple wax ere it was ladled into the birch-bark dishes and set to cool outside the hut. A piece of fat pork hanging from a hook in the cross-piece just touched the surface of the sap and prevented it from effervescing. Tommy was asleep on a heap of fir boughs in a corner, for the boys took it in turn to watch the pot and replenish the fire. The soundness of Tommy's sleep to-night astonished Matt, for usually the young Micmac slept the sleep of the vigilant, a-quiver at the slightest unwonted sound. Matt did not know that his ingenious partner had just completed the distillation of a crude rum from a portion of sap arrested at the molasses stage, and that he had imbibed gloriously thereof.

Matt's painting-stool was an inverted bucket. He wore a fur cap with pendent earlaps that gave him an elderly appearance; and his feet were cased in moccasins, made from the green shank of a cow. For some time he painted steadily, trying to reproduce the picturesque interior of the cabin with his rude home-made colors and brush. The air was warm and charged with resinous odors. The camp-fire burned brightly, the hardwood flaming without snapping or crackling, with only the soft hissing and spurting of liberated gases; the fire purred as if enjoying the warmth. The yellow billows curled round the bulging bottom of the three-legged pot, and sent up delicate spirals of blue smoke, tinged below with flame, to mingle with the white sappy steam that froze as soon as it got outside and disentangled itself from the wood smoke by falling as hoar-frost. At moments when all this smoke lifted Matt could see the stars shining on him through the hole in the roof, stainless and far away in a deep blue patch of heaven. Somehow they made him dissatisfied with his work; they seemed like calm, sovran eyes watching his puny efforts to reproduce, with his pitiable palette, the manifold hues and shades of the simple scene around him—the greasy copper of the Indian boy's face, glistening against the yellow blanket which covered him and the olive-green boughs on which he lay; the motley firewood, the dull brown

tones of the spruce branches, the silver of birch, the yellow of beech; the empty birch-bark troughs, silver-white outside and dull salmon within, touched with tints of light gold or gray. Why, there was a whole color-scheme of subdued rich tints in the moss alone—the dead dry moss that filled up the uneven rifts in the log-roof, and gleamed with a mottle of green and olive and russet. He threw down his brush in despair, longing for the rich, thick paints he vaguely imagined his uncle in London must have—real paints that did not fade as his did, despite the gums he mixed experimentally with them — pure reds and blues and greens and yellows, capable of giving real skies and real grass and real water, and of being mixed into every shade of color the heart could desire. Then he slipped out through the door, shutting it quickly to prevent the hut filling with smoke. The ground was white under a brilliant moon, with here and there patches of silver that wellnigh sparkled. Overhead mystic pallid-gold rays of northern light palpitated across the clear star-strewn heaven. The trees showed more sombre, the birches and maples bare of leafage, the spruces and hemlocks and all the tangled undergrowth reduced to a common gray in the moonlight. Here and there a brown hummock stood solemnly with bared head. And from all this sleeping woodland rose a restless breathing, that incessant stir of a vast alien, self-sufficient life, the rustle of creatures living and moving and having their being in another world than the human, in that dim, remote, teeming underworld of animal life, with its keen joys and transient pains. And every now and then a definite sound disengaged itself from the immense murmur: a chickadee chirped, a black-headed snow-bird twittered, a cat-owl hooted, a rabbit ran from the underwood, as faintly distinguishable from the snow in his white winter coat as he had been from the dead leaves over which he pattered in autumn in his gray homespun.

Matt stood leaning against the door, absorbed into the multifarious night, and hardly conscious of the cold; then he went in, thrilling with vague, sweet emotion, and vast manful resolutions that cast out despair. But he did not take up his brush again. He sat down before the fire in dreamy bliss; all the

asperities of his existence softened by its leaping light, and even that dead face of his father thawed into the pleasant motions of life. The past shone through a mellow, rosy mist, and the future was like the scarlet sunrise of the forest, flaming from splendor to splendor — a future of artistic achievement upon which Ruth Hailey's face smiled applause; a future of easy, unsought riches which banished the gloom upon his mother's.

And then all of a sudden he caught sight of Tommy's clay pipe, fallen from his mouth on to the blanket; and an unforeseen desire to smoke it and put the seal on this hour of happiness invaded the white boy's breast. He rose and picked it up. It was full of charred tobacco. The craving to light it and taste its mysterious joys grew stronger. His mother had sternly forbidden him to smoke, backing up her prohibition by the text in Revelation—"And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit." But now he remembered he had left school; he was a man. He put the stem into his mouth and plucked a brand from the fire, then stood for a moment irresolute. He wondered if any instinct warned his mother of what he was doing, and from that thought it was an easy transition to wondering what *she* was doing. His fancy saw her still running backward and forward, working that great buzzing wheel with stern, joyless face. He put down his pipe.

There was a fresh element in his dreamy bliss as he resumed his seat before the fire, a sense of something high and tranquillizing like the clear stars, yet touching the spring of tears. His head drooped in the drowsy warmth, he surrendered himself to voluptuous sadness, and the outside world grew faint and fading.

When he looked up again his heart almost ceased to beat. At his side loomed a strange female figure, her head covered with a drab shawl that hid her face. She stood in great snowshoes as on a pair of pedestals, and the log walls repeated her form in contorted shadow.

The gentle purring of the fire, the Indian boy's breathing,

sounded painfully in the weird stillness. From without came the manifold rustle of the night.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"Give me a glass of water," she replied, sweetly.

"I hev'n't any water," he breathed.

"I am afire with thirst," she cried. "Quench me! quench me!" Her shawl slipped back, revealing a face of wild, uncanny beauty crowned with an aureola of golden hair. But the awesome thrill that had permeated Matt's being passed into one of æsthetic pleasure mingled with astonished recognition.

"Why, it's Mad Peggy!" he murmured.

"Aye, it's the Water-Drinker!" assented the beautiful visitor, in soft, musical tones, thereupon crying out, "Water, water, for God's sake!"

"I hev'n't any water, I tell you. Not till I git some from the spring in the mornin'. Hev some sap!"

And Matt, starting to his feet, plunged the dipper into the barrel of raw sap that stood on the floor. Mad Peggy seized it greedily and drained the great ladle to the dregs. Then she filled it again with delicious fluid, and then again, and yet again, leaving Matt aghast at her gigantic capacity. She was filling the dipper a fourth time, but he pulled it out of her hand, fearing she would do herself a mischief.

"I'm so thirsty!" she whispered, plaintively, in her musical accents.

"What are you doin' in the woods at this hour?" answered Matt, sternly.

"I'm looking for Peter. What a bonny fire!" And she bent over it, holding out her long, white hands to the flames.

Matt divined vaguely that Peter must be the sweetheart whose desertion had crazed the poor creature. It was reported in Cobequid Village that the handsome German immigrant who had been betrothed to her had gone off forever on the pretext of "sugaring" when he learned that she was one of the Water-Drinkers—the unhappy family whose ancestor had refused a cup of cold water to a strange old woman, who thereupon put the curse upon him and his descendants that they

"'I AM AFIRE WITH THIRST,' SHE CRIED"

might drink water and drink water and never quench their thirst. Peggy was reputed quite harmless.

"You haven't seen Peter, have you?" she cooed, suddenly.

"No," replied Matt, with a fresh, nervous thrill. "But this is not a night for you to be out and about. It's bitter cold."

"It's bitter cold," she repeated, "bitter cold for an old man like you, but not for a girl like me, loved by the handsomest young fellow in the Province; the heart within me keeps me warm, always warm and thirsty. Give me more water."

"No, you've hed 'nough," said Matt. "It's a shame your folks don't look arter you better."

"Look after me! They're all up at the ball, the heartless creatures; but I saw the weddings, both of them, in spite of them all, and I think it's high time Peter came back from the sugaring to *our* wedding, and I've come to tell him so. This is the spot he used to sugar at. Are you sure you haven't seen him? You are his partner; confess, now," she wound up, cajolingly, turning her lovely face towards his troubled gaze.

"Can't you see I'm only a boy?" he replied.

"Nonsense. You're not a boy. Boys always call after me and pull my shawl. I know all the boys."

Matt felt the moisture gathering afresh under his eyelids.

"What's your name, then?" she went on, sweetly.

"Matt," he murmured.

"Ah, mad!" she cried, in ecstasy. "We are cousins — I knew it! That's what they call me."

Her wild eyes shone in the firelight. The boy shuddered.

"Not mad, but Matt!" he corrected her.

"Ah, yes, Mad Matt! Cousins! Mad Peggy—Mad Matt!"

"I'm not mad," he protested, feebly.

"Yes, yes, you are!" she cried, passionately. "I can see it in your face. And yet you won't give me a cup of water."

"You've drunk 'nough," said the boy, soothingly.

"Oh, what lovely little devils," she exclaimed, catching sight of the wall decorations. "Do *you* see devils, too? Didn't I say we were cousins? Why, there's one of the bridegrooms—ha! ha! ha! I guess he didn't show the cloven hoof this morning."

"Which is the bridegroom?" asked Matt, piqued into curiosity.

"There—there he is! There is the boy!" She pointed to the best portrait of Bully Preep. "*He* always called after me, the little devil."

Matt's heart beat excitedly, his face crimsoned. But his strange visitor's next words threw him back into uneasy chaos.

"Oh, but everybody is saying how scandalous it is! with his wife only six months in her grave. Look how long Peter and I have waited. Most of the girls in the village get engaged half a dozen times; they don't know what love is, they don't know anything, they've got no education. But I've only been engaged once, and I'm so thirsty. And you've got her too, the little angel! Everybody is saying how hard it is for her! And yet they all go to the ball. May they dance till they drop, the hypocrites!"

"What are you sayin'?" faltered Matt. "Hard for Ruth Hailey? Why, she's only a little girl."

"She isn't a little girl. Little girls run after me. I know all the little girls. She's a little angel! Just as you've pictured her. Give me some more water."

This time Matt surrendered the dipper to her.

"Thank you, Cousin Matt," she said, and drank feverishly. But seeing that she was about to dip again, he placed himself between her and the barrel. She turned away with a marvellously dexterous movement considering her cumbrous foot-gear, and dipped the ladle into the seething caldron instead. But Matt seized her arm and stayed her from extracting the dipper.

"You'll scald yourself," he said.

"Let go my arm," she cried, threateningly. "How dare you touch me—you are not Peter!"

"You mustn't drink any more."

"You are very cruel!" she moaned. "Who is that sleeping there? Perhaps it is Peter. I will wake him up; he will give me water. I am so thirsty." She moaned and crooned over the three-legged caldron, stirring the sap feebly with the ladle in her efforts to wrest herself free, and the white steam curled

about her face, and gave her the air of a young, beautiful witch bent over a caldron. Matt forgot everything except that he would like to make a picture of her as she appeared now.

"You'd best go to sleep," he said at last, awakening to a remembrance of the strange situation. "There's my bed—those fir-boughs—you kin lie down there till the mornin', and I'll cover you with my blanket."

"I want water," she crooned.

"You kin't get it," said Matt.

"Then may the curse light on you and yours," she cried, stirring the sap more fiercely in her struggle, while the vapor and the wood smoke rose in denser volumes around her. "May you thirst and thirst, and never be satisfied! And that is to be your fate, Cousin Matt. I read it in your face, in your eyes. Never to quench your thirst—never, never, never! To thirst and thirst and thirst for everything, and never to be satisfied, never to have anything you want. Mad Matt and Mad Peggy—cousins, you and I! Ha! ha! ha!" Her laugh of malicious glee made the boy's blood run cold. From without came the answering screech of a wild-cat.

"Lie down and rest!" repeated Matt, imperatively.

"What! stay here with you? No, no, no, Cousin Matt. I know what you want. You want to paint me and put me on the wall among the devils! No, no, I must be off to find Peter. I shall stay with him in his cabin."

Her grip of the dipper relaxed; it reeled against the side of the pot. She turned away, and Matt let go her arm and watched her, spellbound. She drew the thick dun shawl over her head, again veiling the glory of the golden hair, and almost brought the edges together over her sad beautiful face, so that the eyes alone shone out with unearthly radiance. Then she moved slowly towards the door and thrust it open, and the wind came in, and filled the entire cabin with heavy, acrid smoke, which got into Matt's eyes and throat, and woke even the Indian boy, who sat up choking and rubbing his black, beady eyes.

"Dam door shuttum!" he cried, with unusual vehemence.

The words broke Matt's spell. He rushed to the door, but his smarting eyes could detect no gray-shawled figure gliding

among the gray trunks. He closed the door, wondering if he had been dreaming.

"'Tain't your turn yet, Tommy," he said, waving away the smoke with his hand, and Tommy fell back asleep, as if mesmerized. Matt was as relieved at not having to explain as at Tommy's momentary wakefulness, which had braced him against the superstitious awe that had been invading him while the mad beauty cursed him with that sweet voice of hers that no anger could make harsh. He thought of the apparition with pity, mingled with a thrill of solemn adoration; she had for him the beauty and wildness of the elemental, like the sky or the sea. And yet she had left in him other feelings—not only the doubt of her reality, but an uneasy stirring of apprehensions. Was there nothing but insane babble in this talk of Ruth Hailey and Abner Preep? A fear he could not define weighed at his heart. Even if he had been dreaming, if he had drowsed over the fire—as he must in any case have done not to have heard the scrape and clatter of snow-shoes entering—the dream portended something evil. But, no! it was not a dream. Assuredly the sap in the barrel had sunk to a lower level. With a new thought he lit a resinous bough and slipped out quickly and examined the dry stiff snow. The double trail of departing snow-shoes was manifest, meandering among the bark dishes and irregularly intersecting the trail of arrival. The radiant moonlight falling through the thin bare maple-boughs made his torch superfluous, except in the fuscous glade of leafy evergreens, along which he followed the giant footmarks for some little distance. He paused, leaning against a tall hemlock. Doubt was impossible. He had really entertained a visitor. Not seldom in former years had he entertained visitors who came to camp out for the night, which they made uproarious. But never had his hut sheltered so strange a guest. He was moved at the thought of her drifting across the wastes of snow like some fallen spirit. He looked up and abstractedly watched a crow sleeping with its head under its wing on the top of the hemlock, then his vision wandered to the flashing streamers of northern light, and, higher still, to those keen depths of frosty sky where the stars stood beautiful, and they drew up his

thoughts yearningly to the infinite spaces. Something cried within him for he knew not what—save that it was very great and very majestic and very beautiful, mystically blending the luminousness of light and color with the scent of flowers and the troubled sweetness of music; and at the back of his dim, delicious craving for it was a haunting certainty that he would never reach up to it, never, never. The prophecy of mad Peggy recurred to the boy like a cutting blast of wind. Was it true, then, that he would thirst and thirst, and nothing ever quench his thirst? He held up his torch yearningly to the stars, while the night moaned around him, and the flaring pinewood cast a grotesque shadow of him on the pure white snow, an uncouth image that danced and leered as in mockery.

CHAPTER VI

DISILLUSIONS

As soon as he could get away next morning Matt drew on his oversocks and started for home, racked by indefinite fears. He had not troubled to rouse Tommy to take his watch, for he knew he himself would not sleep a wink, and it seemed a pity to disturb so deep and healthy a slumber; so he bustled about to blur his thoughts, and had breakfast ready an hour after sunrise, which his anxiety did not prevent him from observing. To see sky and forest take fire in gradual glory was an ecstasy transcending the apprehensions of the moment.

Tommy had asked no questions during the morning meal, and made no complaints about Matt's failure to rouse him; but on being apprised of his companion's intended journey, he had pointed to the scanty wood-pile—a reminder that had delayed Matt by a couple of hours spent in felling and chopping up a straddle or two. But at last he got away, Tommy undertaking, in a minimum of monosyllables, to attend to everything else. Matt felt afresh the strength and stability of Tommy. Tommy was like Sprat—firm, faithful, and uninquisitive.

He had five miles of clogged walking before him, but he made fairly good progress, for he was unencumbered by snow-shoes, having a light step and an instinct for hollows and drifts, and his oversocks, which reached beyond the knee, kept out the snow when he trod deep. The freshness and buoyancy of the morning dispelled his alarm; dread was impossible under that wonderful blue sky. But as he got deeper and deeper into the recesses under thick boughs that shut out the living blue with dead gray, and took the sparkle out of the snow, his gloom returned, and lasted till he was nearly at his journey's end, when the road caught the sunlight again just as the thought of home flooded his soul. And soon a bend brought the goal in sight. There it was, the dear old house, standing back from the road, in the midst of its little clearing, the sun shining on its bleached clapboards, the black window-sashes standing out fantastically against the white panes, opaque with frosty designs. The smoke curled tranquilly from the chimney towards the over-arching azure, making the home seem a living creature whose breath was thus condensed to visibility. It seemed months since he had left it, yet it was absolutely unchanged. And then he heard the cock crow from the rear, and his last fears vanished like evil spirits of the night, and a wave of pleasurable anticipation bore him to the porch.

He opened the door—no one ever fastened doors by day, for burglars came only in the milder form of peddlers, and other visitors were accustomed to stable their horses and take their seats at the board without ceremony or warning. It was not far from noon, but he heard no sounds about the house, except the crowing of the cock, which continued, and brought up to memory a grotesque and long-obliterated image of his mother holding on to the leg of a soaring hawk that had picked up a chicken. He listened for the lowing of Daisy; then, remembering she was dead and salted, he moved forward into the passage. But he found nobody in the living-room. There was not even a fire. The clumsy spinning-wheel stood silent. The table was bare and tidy; the chairs were neatly ranged. He ran into the kitchen—it radiated bleaker desolation. Matt fought against the cold chill that was gathering at his heart. Of course there

would be nobody at home. Harriet was sewing somewhere, most of the children were at school; and his mother, instead of leaving the baby in the kitchen with one of them, must have taken it with her to her work. And yet it was all very depressing and very disappointing. Then he remembered, with a fresh shock, the smoke he had seen curling from the roof, and for an instant he was oppressed by a sense of the uncanny. An atmosphere of horror seemed to brood over the house. But the recollection of a proverb of Deacon Hailey's, "There's no smoke without fire, hey?" uttered in a moment of unusual articulateness, brought back common-sense. He ran up to the bedrooms, but there was not even a stove, except in his mother's room—a room tapestried with texts worked in Berlin wool on perforated card-board—where the bed had not been made, and where there were traces of extinct logs. Immeasurably puzzled, and wondering if the smoke had been an optical illusion, he returned to the living-room. There was only one room he had not gone into—the best room—and when he at last recollected the existence of it he did not immediately enter it. Only visitors had the enjoyment of this room and the privilege of sitting gingerly on its cane chairs and surveying its papered walls; and, in the absence of the family, there could be no reception in progress. When, for the sake of logical exhaustiveness, he did approach the door, it was listlessly and with a certain constraint, amounting to awe. His nostrils already scented the magnificent mustiness of its atmosphere. He opened the door with noiseless reverence. Then he stood rigid, like one turned to stone by the sight of Medusa's head. It was indeed a head that petrified him—or, rather, two heads, one pressed against the other. Though he had only a back view of them, he knew them both. The lank black hair was Bully Preep's, the long auburn-brown tresses were Harriet Strang's. A fire had been lighted, regardless of the polish of the Franklin stove and the severity of its fancy scroll-work and ornamental urn; and before this fire his sister sat on Abner's knee, and Abner sat on a cane chair, tilting it with a familiarity that hovered on contempt. The treble shock was too great. Matt was dumb and sick and cold, though red-hot thoughts hur-

tled in his brain. What! The skunk had sneaked in during his mother's absence, and it was thus that Harriet did the honors!

He struggled to get his voice back. "Harriet!" he cried, in raucous remonstrance.

Harriet gave a little shriek and turned her head. The color fled from her soft cheeks as she caught sight of her outraged junior, then the blush returned in fuller crimson. Matt fixed her with a stern, imperious eye.

"What are you doin' in the best room?" was the phrase that leaped to his angry lips.

Abner turned on him a face of smiling friendship.

"The best thing," he replied, gayly.

"How dare you kiss my sister?" thundered Matt.

"Don't be a fool, Matt!" said Abner, amiably. "She isn't on'y your sister—she's my wife."

"Your wife!" breathed Matt.

"Yes, don't be streaked, dear. We were married yesterday." And Harriet disentangled herself from Abner and ran to throw her arms round Matt. But the boy repulsed her with a commanding gesture.

"Don't come near me!" he cried, huskily. "Where's mother? Does she know?"

"Oh, Matt!" cried Harriet, reproachfully, "d'you think I'd marry without her consent!"

"I call it rael mean, anyways," he cried, tears of vexation getting into his eyes and his voice, "to take advantage of a feller like that, jest because his back's turned!"

"Waal, we won't do it agen!" cried Abner, with unshakable good-humor. "See here, Matt," and he rose, too, revealing the slight tendency to crookedness of lower limb that offended the exigent eye of his mother-in-law, "let's be pals. You were allus a spunky little chap, and I liked you from the day you stood up agin me and blacked my eye, though you had to jump up a'most to reach it. I was a beast in them thar days, but I raelly ain't now, thanks to Harriet—God bless her! I know you don't like my legs," he added, with a flash of humor, "but there's on'y two of 'em, anyways."

"An' thet's two too many, you crawlin' reptile," retorted Matt. Then, turning to Harriet, he went on in slow, measured accents, "And is this—chap—goin' to—live here?"

"He is so," retorted Harriet.

"Then," said Matt, with ominous calm—"then you won't hev me here, thet's all."

"Of course we won't," said Harriet, with a pleasant laugh. "You'll live with mother."

"With mother?" repeated Matt, staring.

"Yes; down to Deacon Hailey's."

"Hes mother gone to live to Deacon Hailey's?" he asked, excitedly.

"You bet!" put in Abner, grinning genially.

"What—altogether?" exclaimed Matt. The world seemed going round as it did in the geography books.

"I guess so."

"I won't hev it!" cried Matt, agitatedly. "I won't hev her slavin' like a nigger. It was bad enough afore, when she hed to go there every day. But now she's naught but a servant. It's a shame, I do declare. An' you, Harriet!" he said, turning fiercely on her again; "ain't you 'shamed o' yourself, drivin' mother out of house and home?"

"No," said Harriet, stoutly.

The laughter that lurked about her mouth filled him with a trembling presentiment of the truth.

"Don't you understand?" said Abner, kindly. "Your mother's been and gone and married the deacon, and a good thing for all o' you, I do allow."

"You're a liar!" hissed the boy. The world spun round more fiercely.

Abner shrugged his shoulders good-temperedly.

"You see, it was all arranged in a hurry, Matt," said Harriet, deprecatingly. "An' mother thought we'd best get it all over, an' so we were both married yesterday, an' we thought it a pity to bother you to come all the way. But you hevn't finished, hev you? Where's the sugar?"

"An' a nice scandal, I vow!" he cried, furiously. "Everybody is talkin' 'bout it."

"Oh come, Matt, thet's a good un," laughed Abner. "Why, you've heerd nuthin' 'bout it."

"Oh, hevn't I?" returned Matt, with sullen mysteriousness. "I don't know thet everybody went there an' everybody said it was a shame. Oh no; I'm blind and deaf, thet's what I am."

"Don't make such a touse, Matt," said Harriet, putting her hair behind her ears with some calmness. "Don't you see things air ever so much better? I've got a man to support me," and she put her arms lovingly round Abner's neck, as if supporting him, "an' mother 'll be quite a lady, not a servant, as you were silly 'nough to allow, an' you won't hev to work so hard. An' I'll tell you what, Matt, you shall come here sometimes an' draw your picters, an' mother won't know."

But Matt clinched his teeth. The bait was tempting, but unfortunately it reminded him of his obedience to his mother the night before, when in deference to her views he had denied himself the joy of Tommy's pipe. Oh, how he had been duped and bamboozled! At the very hour his inner eye had seen her toiling, sorrowful at her spinning-wheel, she was frolicking at her wedding-ball in gay attire. A vast self-compassion softened his indignation and raw misery. He turned his back on the newly-married couple, and strode from the house, lest they should misinterpret his tears. But the tears did not come—anger rekindling evaporated them unshed. What right had the deacon to steal his mother without even asking him? And how ignoble of his mother to forget his father thus! He figured Ruth Hailey replacing himself by another boy merely because he was dead. It seemed sacrilege. And yet no doubt Ruth was as bad as the rest of her sex. Had she not submitted tamely to the supplanting of her dead mother—nay, was she not a necessary accomplice in the conspiracy to keep him ignorant of the double marriage? Then he had a vague remembrance that he had once heard she was not originally the deacon's daughter, but only the late Mrs. Hailey's, which somehow seemed to exonerate her from the full burden of his doings. Still, she had unquestionably been sly.

His feet had turned instinctively back towards the lonely

forest. No, he would not go and live with the deacon, not even though it brought Ruth within daily proximity. His attitude towards the deacon had never been cordial—nay, the auditory strain upon him when "Ole Hey" spoke to him had gone far towards making him antipathetic. It seemed monstrous that such an old mumbler should have been deemed fit to replace the cheery sailor who had gone down wrapped in his flag. No, Matt at least would have none of him. Life under his roof would be a discord of jarring memories. He would go back to his hut and live in the wood. He would shoot enough to live upon, and there, alone and self-sufficient and free as its denizens, he would pass his life painting and sketching. Or, if he wanted society, he would seek that of the Indian, the simple, noble Indian, and pitch his lot with his for a time or forever. Or perhaps Tommy would stay with him—Tommy who was deep without being wily, and restful without being dull. What a pity Billy was disabled; they might have seceded together, but fate had separated them, not his will.

The five miles were longer now, and the sky had grown a shade colder, but he trod the gloomiest paths unchilled. His heart was hot with revolt. As he came to the little open space round the hut a curious phenomenon arrested his attention. There was no smoke curling above the chimney-hole. A problem—the exact reverse of that which had greeted him at the other terminus of his journey—clamored for solution. Surely Tommy had not let the fire go out! He hastened his steps, and saw that the door stood wide open on its leather hinges, projecting outwards into the forest. Outside, too, empty birch-bark troughs were scattered about in lieu of being piled up neatly. The air of desolation sobered him like a cold douche. He was frightened. He had not even courage to dwell on the thought of what foreboding whispered. But perhaps Tommy had only gone to sleep again, and forgotten about the fire. With a gleam of hope he ran to the entrance, then leaped back with a wild thrill, and slammed the door to and put his back to it and stood palpitating, restrained only by excitement from breaking down in childish tears. The interior of the hut had been transformed as by enchantment. Of barrels, axes, iron-

ware, provender, even of his rude paints, there was not a trace, though the birch-bark picture exhibition was undisturbed. The birch-boughs were littered over the floor. There was no Tommy. But in the centre of the cabin, where the fire had been, lay a matted bear, voluptuously curled up on the warm ashes, and licking the mellifluous soil, which was syrup-sodden by drops that had fallen from the sap-pot. The beautiful sunshine had lured the animal from its winter sleeping-chamber, famished after its long fast.

It was a moment Matt never forgot; one of those moments that age and imbitter. As he stood with squared shoulders against the rough, battened door, that was built of stout slabs, he shook from head to foot with mingled emotions. Numb misery alternated with burning flashes of righteous indignation against humanity, red and white. And with it all was a stirring of the hunter's instinct—an itching to shoot the creature on the other side of the door—which aggravated his vexation by the reminder that even his gun had been stolen. It eased him a little to let his mind dwell on the prospect of potting such glorious game; but first of all he must run Tommy to earth. Tommy could not have gone far, burdened as he would be with the spoil.

The broken-hearted boy moved stealthily from the door and pushed up a small trunk that he had cut down that morning, but not yet chopped up. With some difficulty he raised this and propped it against the door, which, being already latched, could not easily be burst open by the bear. The creature was, moreover, likely to resume its winter nap in the snug, sweet quarters in which it found itself. Having thus trapped his bear, Matt started off by a cross-cut in the direction of the Indian encampment, to which he presumed Tommy would naturally have returned full-handed. But he had not gone a hundred yards before he called himself a fool, and ran back. In his agitation he had forgotten to note the trail of the sled in which Tommy must have drawn off the things. This he now discovered ran quite in the opposite direction, and was complicated not only by Tommy's footmarks, but by a man's. Whither had Tommy decamped? The day seemed made up of

surprises and puzzles. However, there was everything to gain, or rather regain, by following the dusky young impostor and the accomplice who had helped him to draw the heavy sled. Matt discovered that the trail led towards Long Village, two and a half miles off, and instantly it flashed upon him that Tommy had gone there to dispose of the things. He quickened his pace, and in less than half an hour strode into a truer solution of the mystery, for suddenly he found himself amid dogs grubbing in the sunshine and swaddled pappooses swinging on the poles of birch-bark wigwams, and perceived that the vagrant Micmacs had shifted their encampment during the fortnight. Tommy's knowledge of the migration argued secret correspondence, unless a tribal tempter had visited him accidentally during Matt's absence—which seemed rather improbable.

Matt's soul was aflame with wrath and resentment. He rushed about among the wigwams, unceremoniously peering behind the blankets that overhung the doorways, which were partly blocked by spruce boughs arranged to spring back and forth. Bow-legged, round-shouldered, dumpy men, with complexions of grayish copper, squatting cross-legged on fir boughs before the central fire, smoked on unresentful, a few ejaculating sullenly, "*Kogwa pawotumun?*" ("What is your wish?") Their faces had nothing of the American hatchet-shape; they would have been round but for the angularity of the jaw, and Chinese but for the eyes, which did not slant upward, but were beady and wide apart. The cheek-bones were high, the nose was of a negro flatness, and the straight black hair was long and matted. In attire the men had an air of shabby civilization, which went ill with the blankets and skins overwrapping the white men's leavings. Near the door—in the quarter of less distinction—sitting with feet twisted round to one side, one under the other, as befits the inferior sex—were women good-looking but greasy, who wore shawls and blankets over their kerchiefed heads, and necklaces of blue beads twinkling against their olive throats, and smoked as gravely as their lords. But Tommy was invisible. Nor could Matt see anything of the stolen goods. But in one tent he found Tommy's

father, and, discourteously omitting the "Kwa" of greeting, plied him with indignant questions in a mixture of bad English and worse Indian.

Tommy's father understood little and knew nothing. He did not invite the visitor into the tent, but smoked on peacefully and whittled a shaving, and Matt's admiration of the red man's taciturnity died a painful death. Had Tommy's father not even seen Tommy? No; Tommy's father had not seen Tommy for half a moon, and the smoke curled peacefully round Tommy's father's greasy head. Never had the unspeakable uncleanliness of the picturesque figure struck Matt as it did now. He moved away with heavy heart and heavy footstep, and interviewed other Indians, equally dingy and equally reticent; even the squaws kept the secret.

Matt went back in despairing anger and poured out his passion in a flood of remonstrance upon the unwashed head of Tommy's father; he pointed to the trail of the sled that drew up at Tommy's father's tent, he reasoned, he threatened, he clinched his fist and stamped his foot; and Tommy's father smoked the pipe of peace and whittled the shaving. The Indian held the stick on his knee and drew the knife towards himself, unlike the white man, who cuts away from himself. It was a crooked knife, with a notch for the thumb in the handle. Matt's spirit oozed away before its imperturbable movement to and fro. He felt sick and faint; he became vaguely conscious that he had eaten nothing since breakfast. Then he remembered the bear waiting in the cabin—waiting to be killed. With a happy thought he informed Tommy's father that he had trapped a bear and could conduct him to the spot, and Tommy's father instantly began to understand him better; and when Matt proceeded to offer him the beast in exchange for the stolen goods, the Micmac betrayed a complete comprehension of the offer, and with a courteous exclamation of "*Up-chelase*," invited him into the furthermost and most honorable portion of the tent. He even rose and held colloquy with some of his brethren gathered round. A bear was a valuable property—dead. His snout alone was worth five dollars, when presented as a death certificate to a grateful government, anxious to extinguish him.

These five dollars were a great consideration to a tribe paid mainly in kind, and hard pushed to find coin for the annual remission of sin at the hands of the priests. The bear's skin would fetch four or five dollars more; while its three or four hundred pounds of flesh would set up the larder for the season. As a result of the native council, Tommy's father informed Matt that he had just learned Tommy had been seen that morning, but that he had hauled the sled past the encampment on his way to Long Village to sell the freight (which nobody had suspected was not his own property, the much dam thief). He had, however, left a gun with a boy friend, and if Matt was content to swop the bear for this, he could have it. Matt, fuming at his own helplessness, consented. The gun was accordingly produced; Matt recognized his old friend, but Tommy's father explained in easy pantomime that when bear was dead boy would get gun, and not before; and he handed it to a blanketless by-stander, who had evidently bartered external heat for internal fire-water. Then, shouldering his own gun, he motioned to Matt to lead the way. The little procession of three set forth, the second Indian prudently providing himself with a flat, wide sledge. The afternoon was waning, the blue overhead had lost in luminousness, leaving the coloring of the earth more vivid. But the shifting of nature's kaleidoscope had ceased to interest Matt; humanity occupied him exclusively, and the evil that was done under the sun. Man or woman, white or red, they were all alike—a skulking, shifty breed. It was not only he that had been betrayed; it was truth, it was honor. Were these things, then, merely lip-babble?

On their arrival at the hut Matt explained the position. He was about to remove the log that braced up the door, but Tommy's father pulled him violently back, and gestured that it was much more convenient to shoot the animal through the chimney-hole. Matt felt a qualm of disgust and remorse. It seemed cowardly to give the poor beast that had taken refuge in his hut no chance. He leaned sullenly against the door, feeling almost like one who had betrayed the laws of hospitality, and conscious, moreover, of a strange savage sympathy with the bear in its strife with humanity. His last respect for the

noble red man vanished when the two Micmacs clambered upon the low-pitched roof. They uttered "ughs" of satisfaction as they peeped over the great square hole and perceived their prey asleep. After some amiable banter of the animal they began to put their guns into position. But Tommy's father insisted on having the glory of the deed, since he was paying for the bear with Matt's gun, and his rival ungraciously yielded. In his cocksureness, however, Tommy's father merely hit the bear's shoulder. The creature started up with a fierce growl, and began biting savagely at the bleeding wound. Excited by his failure and the brute's leap up, Tommy's father leaned more over the hole for his second shot; but his companion, exclaiming that it was his turn now, pushed him back, and strove to get his body in front. Tommy's father, who was now effervescing with excitement, thrust himself more forward still, and in his zeal succeeded so well that he suddenly found himself flying headforemost into the hut, while the gun went off at random. The bullet missed, but the man struck the obfuscated creature with a thud, ricochetted off its back, and lay prostrate on the branch-strewn floor.

The sound of the fall, the explosion, the cry of dismay from the roof, informed Matt of what had happened. In a flash his sympathy went back to man. He cried to the other Indian to shoot, but the latter's arm was shaking, and the bear, after a few seconds of bewilderment, had risen on its hind legs and stood over the fallen man growling fiercely, so that the Micmac was afraid of hitting his friend. Matt reached up impatiently for his gun, which the Micmac readily handed to him in unforeseen violation of orders, and Matt, overthrowing the door-prop with the butt end, lifted the latch and dashed in. Tommy's father was already in the bear's grip, the infuriated animal's elastic fore-paws beginning to press horribly upon his ribs. Matt clapped the barrel of the gun to the bear's ear; then he was overswept by a fearsome doubt lest the gun had been unloaded since it had left his hands. But his suspense was short. He pressed the trigger; there was a ringing explosion, and the creature bounded into the air, relaxing its hold of the Indian, upon whom it fell again in its death-agony. Matt, aided by the

other Micmac, who hurried in, grunting, disentangled Tommy's father from the writhing heap, and found him bruised and breathless, but practically uninjured. Tommy's father vowed eternal gratitude to his rescuer, and said his life was henceforward at Matt's disposal. The boy curtly asked for his property instead, whereupon the Indian shook his head and shrugged his shoulders in token of impotence. Rolling the bear over with a prod of his contemptuous foot, he produced his knife and started scalping and skinning the dead enemy, while his brother-in-arms lit some boughs, and cut a juicy steak from the carcass and set it to broil. The warmth was grateful, for the shadows were fast gathering and the hyperborean hours returning. A covey of bob-whites whirred past, and the weird note of a hoot-owl was borne on the bleak air.

The Indians offered the boy "a cut from the joint," and he refused sulkily—a deadly insult in normal circumstances. But the keen pangs of hunger and the delicious odor of the meat weakened him, and a later invitation to join the squatting diners found him ravenously responsive, though he felt he had bartered away his righteous indignation for a mess of pottage. During the meal his guests or his hosts (he knew not which they were) betrayed considerable interest in his mural decorations, which they evidently regarded as symptoms of a relapse from Christianity, and they were astonished, too, at his refusal to quaff more than a mouthful or two of their rum—the coarse concoction locally nicknamed "rot-gut." While Matt, who had started last, was still eating from the birch-bark dish he had utilized for the purpose, Tommy's father lit his after-dinner pipe, and, having taken a few whiffs, passed it on to his companion, who in turn held out to Matt the long, reedy stem with its feather ornaments.

The offer sent a thrill through the boy's whole being. All his grievances ascended afresh from the red stone bowl and mingled with the fragrant smoke. How good, how obedient he had been! And all for what? A lump gathered in his throat, so that he could not swallow his bit of bear. He nodded assent, his heart throbbing with defiant manhood, and motioned to the Micmac to place the pipe beside his dish till he

was ready for it. The two Indians then hauled the carcass athwart the sledge hastily, for night had come on as though shed from the starless sky, and they called to Matt to come along, but Matt shouted back that he did not intend to accompany them. He no longer craved to cast in his lot with the red man. Yet he went to the door of his tent to watch his fellow-hunters disappear among the sombre groves, and a deeper dusk seemed to fall on the landscape when the very rustle of their passage died away. But as he turned in again and fastened up the door, his heart leaped up afresh with the leaping flames. The sense of absolute solitude became exultation—a keen, bitter joy. Here was his home; he had no other. He had parted company with humanity forever.

He reseated himself on a little pile of fir boughs in his deserted home, that was naked but for the wall-pictures—the least comforting of all possible salvage, since they were the only things Tommy had not thought worth stealing. As Matt sat brooding, darker patches on the soil, and spots upon some of those pictures, caught his eye. He saw they were of blood. In one place there was quite a little pool which had not yet sunk into the earth or evaporated. He touched it curiously with his finger, and wiped away the stain against a leaf. Then with a sudden thought he curled a piece of bark and scooped up the blood into his birchen dish, as a possible color, murmuring, gleefully:

"'Who caught his blood?'
'I,' said the fish,
'With my little dish,
I caught his blood.'"

In moving the "little dish" he laid bare Tommy's father's calumet, forgotten. He took it up. How the universe had changed since last he held a pipe in his hand — only last night! Again he heard the howl of a wild-cat, and he looked round involuntarily, as if expecting to find Mad Peggy at his elbow. But he had no sense of awe just now—though he had barred his door inhospitably against further bears—only the voluptuousness of liberty and loneliness, the healthy after-glow of satisfied appetite, and the gayety born of flaming logs and a

couple of mouthfuls of fire-water. The Water-Drinker's prophecy seemed peculiarly inept in view of the pipe he held in his hand. With tremulous anticipation of more than mortal rapture he relit it. The sensation was unexpectedly pungent, but Matt puffed away steadily in hope and trust that this was merely the verdict of an unaccustomed palate, and he found a vast compensatory pleasure in his ability to make the thing work, to send the delicate wreaths into the air as ably as any Micmac or deacon of them all.

But soon even this pleasure began to be swamped by a wave of less agreeable sensation, and Matt, puzzled and chagrined, after a gallant stand, threw down the calumet, and hastened into the cold air with palpitating heart and splitting head, and there, in the maple wood, Bruin was avenged. That night, despite his vigil of the night before, Matt Strang vainly endeavored to close his eyes upon an unsatisfactory world.

CHAPTER VII

THE APPRENTICE

The long, endless years, crowded with petty episodes and uniformities, and moving like a cumbrous, creeping train that stops at every station, flash like an express past the eye of memory. Yet it is these unrecorded minutiæ of monotonous months that color the fabric of our future lives, eating into our souls like a slow acid. When, in after years, Matt Strang's youth defiled before him, the panorama seemed more varied than when he was living the scenes in all their daily detail of dull routine, and when, whatever their superficial differences, they were all linked for him by an underlying unity of toil and aspiration.

First came his apprenticeship in Cattermole's saw-mill, at the opposite outskirt of the forest, twenty miles from Cobequid. For, though he early tired of savagery, as a blind-alley on the road to picture-painting, he refused, in the dogged pride of his

boyish heart, to return to his folks, contenting himself with informing them of his whereabouts and of his intention to apprentice himself (with or without their consent). Labor being so scarce that year, Deacon Hailey drove over in great haste to offer him a loving home. Matt, who happened to be in the house, which was only parted from the mill-stream by a large vegetable-garden, saw through a window the deacon's buggy arrive at the garden-path, and the deacon himself alight to open the wooden gate. The boy's resentment flamed afresh, and it was supplemented by dread of the deacon's inarticulate conversation. He fled to Mrs. Cattermole in the kitchen.

She was a shrewish, angular person, economical of everything save angry breath. A black silk cap with prim bows and ribbons sat severely on her head, and a thread-net confined her hair. Cattermole, a simple, religious, hen-pecked creature, had gone to the village store to trade off butter.

"There's Ole Hey coming!" cried Matt, breathlessly.

"Kin't you speak quietly?" thundered Mrs. Cattermole. "You made my heart jump like a frog. You don't mean Ole Hey from Cobequid, the man es you said married your mother?"

"Yes, thet's the skunk. I reckon he's come to take me back."

Mrs. Cattermole's eyes flashed angrily. "Well, I swan! But you've promised to bide with us."

"Thet's so. I wouldn't go back fur Captain Kidd's treasure! I won't see him."

"I'll tell him you're gone away."

"No," said Matt, sturdily. "I wrote that I was goin' to be 'prenticed here, and there ain't any call for lies. Tell him I'm in the kitchen and I won't come out, and I don't want to hev anythin' to do with him. See!"

"Well, set there and mind the cradle, and I'll jest give him slockdologee. You uns allow you're considerable smart, Cobequid way, but I reckon he's struck the wrong track this time."

Matt grinned joyously. "Spunk up to him, ma'am!" he cried, with stirring reminiscences of fights at McTavit's. "Walk into him full split!"

"You mind the baby, young man. There won't be no touse

at all. He don't set foot in my kitchen, and there's an end of it."

Mrs. Cattermole greeted the deacon politely, and informed him that the lad he was inquiring after was sulking in the kitchen, and that he refused to receive his visitor on any account. The deacon sighed unctuously with an air of patient martyrdom. Matt's obduracy heightened his estimate of the lad's value as a gratuitous field-worker, and sharpened his sense of being robbed of what small dowry Mrs. Strang had brought him.

"The boy is dreadful set agin me," he complained. "But, es I told his poor mother, if you let a boy run wild, wild he runs, hey? Anyways, it ain't fur me to fail in lovin'-kindness. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, ain't the gospel *we're* called upon to practise. I allus thinks there's no sort o' use in bein' a Christian on Sundays and a heathen on week-days."

"No, thet thar ain't," Mrs. Cattermole assented, amiably.

"Even to beasts a man kin be a Christian, hey? I reckon I'd better wait in your kitchen an' give the mare a rest. If *I've* come on a fool's errand, thet ain't a reason my ole nag should suffer, hey?"

Mrs. Cattermole, seeing the outworks taken, directed the deacon, by a flank movement, into the parlor, as alone befitting his dignity. To Matt this parlor, far finer than the best room at home, was a chamber of awe, but also of attraction, for its walls were hung with sober Bible prints. Mrs. Cattermole stood there among her splendors with her back to the door, partly for defensive purposes, partly so as not to depreciate one of the hair-cloth chairs by sitting down. It was enough for one day that her guest sat solidly on the rocking-chair of honor.

"We've been hevin' too much soft weather, Mrs. Cattermole, arter all thet heavy snow."

"Yes, I'm afeard the dam will go out," responded Mrs. Cattermole, gloomily.

They discussed the disastrous thaw of a few years back, with a vivid remembrance of the vegetables and dairy produce spoiled in the flooded cellars.

"But it's the Lord's will," summed up the deacon. "It ain't any use heapin' up worldly treasure, I allus thinks."

"Thet's a fact." Mrs. Cattermole shook her head in sad acquiescence.

"Heaven's the on'y safe place to lay up your goods, hey? So I guess I'm just goin' to forgive thet durned boy all the anxiety he's giv his poor mother an' me, an' take him back right along."

"Oh, but I guess you ain't," said Mrs. Cattermole. "We've promised to take him on here."

"We'll let you off thet thar promise, Mrs. Cattermole. We ain't folks as allus wants to hold people tight to every onthinkin' word. An' you won't be the loser hardly, for the lad ain't worth a tin pint to mortal man. He's a dreamy do-nuthin', an' the worry he's been to his poor mother you've no idee—allus wastin' the Lord's hours, unbeknown to her, in scrawlin' picters an' smutchin' boards with colors."

"I reckon he'll come in handy in our paint-shop, then."

The deacon shook his head, as if pitying her bubble delusions.

"He ain't smart, an' he ain't good-tempered. You see for yourself how grouty he is to the best friend a boy ever hed."

"He ain't smart, I know. Thet's why we ain't goin' to pay him no wages."

The deacon chawed his quid and swayed in silent discomfiture.

"Ah, it's his poor mother I'm thinkin' of," he said, after a while. "She's thet delicate she'd kinder worry if he was to—a mother's heart, hey? If 'twas my boy, I'd be proper glad to see him in the han's of sech a hard-workin', God-fearin' couple."

"You hedn't ought to talk to me," said Mrs. Cattermole, softening. "Father 'd be terrible ugly if I was to settle anythin' while he was to the store."

"And if he wouldn't it's a pity. Wives, obey your husbands, hey? But there ain't no call for hurry. More haste less speed, I allus thinks. But I don't want to keep you from your occupations. There air some visitors who forgit folks kin't afford to keep more 'n one Sunday a week, hey? Sorter devil's darnin'-needles flyin' into your ear—they worry you, and they don't do themselves no good. So don't you take no notice of me. I'll jest talk to Matt to fill up the time."

Mrs. Cattermole straightened herself against the door. "He won't listen; he's too mad."

"I reckon I could tone him down some."

"Guess not. He's too sot—he won't come in."

"I ain't proud. I'll go to him. True pride is in doin' what's right, I allus thinks. Some folks kin't see the difference between true pride an' false pride. I'll go to the kitchen."

"I'd raythor you didn't, deacon. It's all in a clutter."

The conversation drooped. The deacon's mouth moved in mere chawing. Swallowing his quid in deference to the parlor, he cut himself a new chunk.

"You've heerd about the doctor, Mrs. Cattermole?" he began again.

"I dunno es I hev."

"What! Not heerd about our doctor es was said to practise the Black Art?"

"Oh, the sorcerer es lives on the ole wood-road. My brother who drives the stage was tellin' me 'bout it. He sets spirits turnin' tables, tellin' the future, an' nobody 'll go past his house arter dark."

"Ah, but the elders called on him last week," said the deacon. "Of course we couldn't hev him in the vestry. An' he explained to the committee thet sperrits or devils ain't got nuthin' to do with it."

"Lan' sakes! An' you believed him?"

"Waal, my motto is allus believe your fellow-critters. An evil mind sees a lookin'-glass everyways, hey? He jest showed us how to make a table turn and answer questions. He says it's no more wonderful than turnin' a grindstone."

"I guess he's pulled the wool over the eyes o' the Church," said Mrs. Cattermole, sceptically.

"Not hardly! He turned thet thar table in broad daylight with the Bible open upon it, to show thet Satan didn't hev a look in."

"The Bible on it! 'Pears to me terrible ongodly."

"Ongodly! Why, you an' me kin do it—two pillars o' the Church! I guess the Evil One couldn't come nigh *us*, hey?"

"I dunno es it would turn if you an' me was to do it."

"You bet! It told me 'bout the future world, an' my poor Susan's Christian name, an' how much to ast for my upland hay."

"Good lan'!" cried Mrs. Cattermole. "An' would it tell me whether my sister is through her sickness yet?"

"You may depend!"

"My! Thet's jest great!" And Mrs. Cattermole eagerly inquired how one set about interrogating the oracle.

The deacon explained, adding that the parlor table would not do. It must be a rough deal table.

"Ah, the kitchin table," said Mrs. Cattermole, walking into the elaborately laid trap.

"I dunno," said the deacon, shaking his head. "Air you sure it ain't too large for us to span around?"

"We could let the flaps down."

The deacon chawed reflectively.

"Waal, it might," he said, cautiously, at last. "There ain't no harm in tryin'. We hedn't ought to give up anythin' without tryin', I allus thinks. One never knows, hey?"

"I kinder think we ought to try," said Mrs. Cattermole.

The deacon rose ponderously, and followed his guide into the kitchen.

"Why, there's Matt!" he cried, in astonished accents. "Good-day, sonny."

Matt strained his ears, but pursed his lips and rocked the cradle in violent impassivity. The deacon was uneasy at the boy's sullen resentment. He could not understand open enemies.

"How's your health, hey?" he asked, affectionately.

"Oh, I'm hunkydory," said Matt, in off-hand school-boy slang.

"I'm considerable glad you've found a good place with rael Christians, Matt. I on'y hope you've made up your mind to work hard an' turn over a new leaf. It's never too late to mend, I allus thinks. You're growin' a young man, now; no more picter-makin', hey? If it warn't that you air so moony an' lay-abed I'd give you a chanst on my own land, with pocket-money into the bargain, hey, an' p'raps a pair o' store shoes fur a Chrismus-box."

A flame shot from Mrs. Cattermole's now-opened eyes. She shut the cellar door with a vicious bang, but ere she could speak Matt cried out, "I wouldn't come, not fur five shillin's a week!"

"An' who wants you to come fur money? What is money, hey? Is it health? Is it happiness? No, no, sonny. If money was any use, my poor Susan would hev been alive to this day. You'll know better when you're my age."

He spat out now, directing the stream into the sink under the big wooden pump.

"Don't worry 'bout him," interposed Mrs. Cattermole. "Here's the table."

Deacon Hailey waved a rebuking palm. "Dooty afore pleasure, Mrs. Cattermole. See here, sonny, I've been talkin' with Mrs. Cattermole 'bout you. She's promised me to be a mother to you, Heaven bless her! But I kin't forget you've got a mother o' your own."

"She ain't my mother now, she's Ruth's mother," said Matt, half divining the mumble of words.

"She's mother to both o' you. A large heart, thet's what she's got. An' if she's Ruth's mother, then I'm your father, hey? An' it ain't right of you to disobey your father and mother. But young folks nowadays treats the commandments like old boots," and the deacon sighed, as if in sympathy with the sorrows of a neglected decalogue.

"I've got no father an' no mother," said Matt. "An' I'm goin' to be a picture-painter soon es I kin. I won't do *any*thing else, thet's flat. An' when I'm bigger I'm goin' to write to my uncle Matt and see if he kin sell my pictures fur me. If you was to drag me back by force, I'd escape into the woods. An' I'd work my way to London to be handy my uncle Matt. I reckon he takes in 'prentices same es the boss here. So you jest tell my mother I'm done with her, see! I don't want to hear any more 'bout it."

His face resumed its set expression, and his rocking foot its violence.

The deacon cast a reproachful, irate glance at Mrs. Cattermole.

"Did I tell you a lie when I said he warn't worth thet thar?"

he vociferated, snatching the tin dipper from the water-bucket. The noise disturbed the baby, which began to whimper feebly. Matt turned his chair's back on the deacon and gazed studiously towards the wood-house in the yard. The deacon's face grew apoplectic. He seemed about to throw the dipper at the back of Matt's head, but mastering himself he let it fall with a splash, and said, quietly: "I guess you won't hev me to blame if he turns out all belly an' no han's. Some folks 'd say I'm offerin' you a smart, likely young man, with his heart in the wood-pile. But thet's not Deacon Hailey's way. He makes a pint of tellin' the bad pints. He's a man you could swap a horse with, hey? I tell you, Mrs. Cattermole, thet durned boy is all moonshine an' viciousness, stuffed with conceit from floor to ridge-piece. Picters, picters, picters, is all he thinks about! Amoosin' himself—thet's his idee of life in this vale of tears. I reckon he thinks he's goin' to strike Captain Kidd's treasure. But, arter all, he ain't *your* burden. I've giv his poor mother a home, an' I ain't the man to grudge bite an' sup to her boy. So even now I don't mind lettin' you off. He's my crost, and I've got to bear him. 'Tain't no use bein' a Christian only in church, hey?"

"I guess I'm a Christian, too," said Mrs. Cattermole. "So I must bear with the poor lad an' train him up some in the way he should go. An' then there's father. You're a rael saint, deacon, but I sorter think where heaven is consarned father 'ud like a look-in es well. So let's say no more 'bout it. Now, then, deacon, the table's waitin'!"

He ignored the patient piece of furniture. "Waal, don't blame me any if the buckwheat turns out bad," he shouted, losing his self-control again, and spurting out his nicotian fluid at the stove like an angry cuttle-fish.

"Thet's so," acquiesced Mrs. Cattermole, quietly. "Now, then, Deacon Hailey, jest you set there." She had taken a chair and placed her hands on the table.

"Hush!" said the deacon. "Don't you see thet thar young un wakin' up? The tarnation boy hes been shakin' him like an earthquake. I didn't know es you kep' your baby in the kitchin or I wouldn't hev troubled to come. When thet thar table kinder began to dance and jump, you wouldn't thank me

fur rousin' the innocent baby, hey? Sleep, sleep, thet's what a baby wants! A baby kin't hev too much sleep an' a grown-up person kin't hev too little, hey? They're a lazy slinky lot, the young men o' the Province, sleepin' with their mouths open, expectin' johnny-cakes to fall into 'em. I wonder this young man here don't get into a cradle hisself. He'd be es much use to his fellow-critters es makin' picters, I do allow. This life's a battle, I allus thinks, an' star-gazin' ain't the way to sight the enemy, hey? I reckon I'll git back now, Mrs. Cattermole. There's 'nough time been wasted over thet limb of Satan. Jest you tell Cattermole what I say 'bout him, an' if ever you git durned sick an' tired feedin' an onthankful lazybones, es you're bound to git, sure es skunks, jest you remember Deacon Hailey is the Christian you're lookin' fur. An' don't you forgit it!" And very solemnly he strode without.

Mrs. Cattermole lifted her hands and brought them down again on the table with a thump. "The tarnation ole fox!" she cried, "tryin' to bamboozle me with tales 'bout turnin' tables. 'Tain't likely es a table is goin' to dance of itself, an' tell me 'bout Maria's sickness. Jest you come here, Matt, an' lay your hands alongside o' mine. What's thet you're doin'?"

For Matt had begun pensively adorning the hood of the cradle by means of a burned stick he had pulled from the stove.

"It's on'y Ole Hey," he said, reddening.

"Jest you leave off makin' fun o' your elders an' betters," she said, sharply. "There 'll be plenty of work fur you in the paint-shop."

There was plenty of work, Matt found, in numerous other directions, too. Many more things than mechanical wood-cutting did the boy practise at Cattermole's saw-mill. To begin with, Mrs. Cattermole's apprehensions were justified and the spring freshets swept away the dam, and so Matt was set to work hauling brushwood and gravel and logs to build up a kind of breast-work. Cattermole was really a house-joiner and house-builder, so Matt acquired cabinet-making, decoration, and house-building. His farming and cattle-rearing experience was also considerably enlarged. He milked the cows, looked after four

stage-horses (driven by Mrs. Cattermole's brother) and thirty-six sheep, cut firewood, cleared out barns, turned churns, hoed potatoes, mowed hay, fed fowls and pigs, and rocked the cradle, and, in the interval of running the circular and up-and-down saws in the mill, worked in the paint-shop at the back, graining and scrolling the furniture and ornamenting it with roses and other gorgeous flowers, sometimes even with landscapes. This was his only opportunity of making pictures, for recreation hours he had none. He rose at four in the morning and went to bed at ten at night. His wages were his food and clothes, both left off.

Mrs. Cattermole made his garments out of her husband's outworn wardrobe, itself of gray homespun.

But the hours in the paint-shop threw their aroma over all the others and made them livable.

And Cattermole, though a hard was not a harsh taskmaster, and had gentle flashes of jest when Mrs. Cattermole was out of ear-shot. And, though winter was long, yet there were seasons of delicious sunshine, when the blueberries ripened on the flats, or the apples waxed rosy in the orchard; when the air thrilled with the song of birds, and the dawn was golden.

In one of these seasons of hope he wrote to his uncle of his father's death and his own existence, and Cattermole paid the postage; an ingenuous letter full of the pathetic, almost incredible ignorance of obscure and sequestered youth, and inquiring what chances there would be for him to reap fortune by painting pictures in London. He addressed the letter—with vague recollection of something in his school reading-book—to Mr. Matthew Strang, Painter, National Gallery, London.

It was not an ill-written letter nor an ill-spelt. Here and there the orthography was original, but in the main McTavit had been not ineffectual, and there were fewer traces of illiteracy about the epistle than might have been imagined from Matt's talk. But in Matt's mind the written and the spoken were kept as distinct as printed type and the manuscript alphabet; they ran on parallel lines that never met, and that "Amur'can" should be spelled "American" seemed no more contradictory than that "throo" should be spelled "through." The grammar

he had used in scholastic exercises was not for everyday wear; it was of a ceremonious dignity that suited with the stateliness of epistolary communication. Alas! For all the carefulness of the composition, his uncle of the National Gallery gave no sign.

Matt's suspense and sorrow dwindled at last into resignation, for he had come to a renewed sense of religion. As Mrs. Strang would have put it, he had found grace. There were a few pious books and tracts about the Cattermole establishment, to devour in stolen snatches or by bartering sleep for reading, and among these dusty treasures he lighted on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with quaint wood-cuts. In the moral fervor with which the dramatic allegory informed him Matt felt wickedness an impossibility henceforward; his future life stretched before him white, fleckless, unstainable. Meanness or falsehood or viciousness could never touch his soul. How curiously people must be constituted who could knowingly prefer evil, when good thrilled one with such rapture, bathed one in such peace! Already he felt the beatitude of the New Jerusalem. The pictures he painted should be *good*, please God. They should exhibit the baseness of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, castigate the town of Carnal Policy; he would uplift the eyes of the wicked to the contemplation of the Shining Ones. Though, after all, he began to ask himself, could any picture equal Bunyan's book? Was not a book immeasurably the better medium of expression? The suspicion was strengthened by the reading of a dime novel which his mistress's brother, the stage-driver, had left lying about. It was the first unadulterated novel he had read, and the sensational episodes stirred his blood, his new-born religious enthusiasm died. He loved Mike the Bush-ranger, who was the hero of the novel. Action, strong, self-dependent action, a big personality—there lay the admirable in life. The Christians and Hopefuls were pale-blooded figures after all, and unreal at that. In actual life one only came across mimics who used their language: the Deacon Haileys or the Abner Preeps, to whom even thieving Tommy were preferable. No wonder Mike had been driven to bush-ranging! What a pity he himself had not remained in his forest hut, rebel against humanity, king of

the woods! Ah! and how inadequate was paint to express the fulness of life; the medium was too childishly simple. At most one could fix a single scene, a single incident, and that only in its outside aspect. Books palpitated with motion and emotion. He set to work to write a dime novel, stealing an hour from his scanty night. He made but slow progress, though he began with an exciting episode about a white boy besieged in his log-hut by a party of Indians, and saved by the sudden advent of a couple of bears. The words he wrote down seemed a paltry rendition of his thought and inner vision, they were tame and scant of syllable. He discovered that his literary palette was even more pitiful than his pictorial. Still he labored on, for the goal was grand. And, despite his mental divorce between pronunciation and orthography, his spoken English improved imperceptibly through all this contact with literature.

Then one wonderful day—to be marked with a white stone and yet also with a black—he received a letter from England. All his artistic ambition flamed up furiously again as he broke the seal:

LONDON, Limners' Club.

DEAR NEPHEW,—Your letter gave me mingled pain and pleasure. I was deeply grieved to hear of the sad death of your dear father. My poor brother had not written to me nor had I seen him since his marriage, but I knew I should somehow hear of it if anything went wrong with him. I am shocked to have remained ignorant for so many months after his death. I really think your mother should have let me know, as she could have discovered my address through my wife's relatives, who live in Halifax. However, I hope God has given her strength to bear the blow. And now, my dear Matthew, let me tell you your letter is very childish, and not what I should have expected of a young man of fourteen as you describe yourself. It is very nice to amuse yourself by painting pictures; it keeps you out of mischief. But how can you fancy that your pictures are worth any money? Why, painting is the most difficult of all the arts; it requires years and years of study under great masters, and it costs a heap of money to pay models—that is, men or women who sit or stand in uncomfortable positions while you are painting them. No picture is any good that is done without models; if you wanted to paint a horse you would have to hire a horse, and that is even more expensive than hiring a man. Otherwise your horse would be all wrong. Why, a friend of mine painted a picture of a forge, and he had to have it all built up in his studio, and it cost a hundred and twenty pounds. Studio! The word reminds me that an artist must have a special room to

work in, with windows on top, and these rooms are very expensive. London is crammed full of artists who have had all these advantages and yet they are starving. The pictures that you do now everybody would laugh at. And where would you get the money for frames? A nice gold frame might redeem your pictures, but gold frames are dear. No, my dear Matthew, you must not be a little fool. How could you, a poor orphan, think of coming to London? Why, you would die in the streets. No; remain where you are, and thank God that you are earning your clothes and your keep with an honest sawyer in a land of peace and plenty, and are not a burden on your poor mother. I hope you will listen to your uncle like a good boy, and grow up to be grateful to him for saving you from starvation. Believe me,

Your affectionate uncle,

MATTHEW STRANG.

Matt's tears blistered the final sheet of this discouraging document. His roseate visions of the future faded to cold gray, his heart ached with a sudden sense of the emptiness of existence. But when he had come to the last word his hand clinched the letter fiercely. A great glow of resolution pervaded his being, like the heat that returns after a cold douche. "I will be a painter. I will, I will, I will!" he hissed. And he tore up the embryo of the dime novel and wrote again to his uncle:

MY DEAR UNCLE,—How good you are to write to me and tell me everything I want to know. Don't be afraid that I will starve in London, dear uncle. I could always earn my living there in the fields and paint late at night, but I won't come till I have enough money for lessons and models and a studio, though I think I could draw horses without hiring them. I have always been very good at animals. Besides, what do they do when they want bears, as the geography book says there aren't any bears in England? I could live in the attic, and knock a hole in the roof. My mother doesn't need anything from me, thank God, as she is married again and bears the blow well, and my sister Harriet is married too, so you see it will be easy for me to save up money. As soon as my apprenticeship is over I shall go on to the States, where the greatest fools make heaps of money, and so in a few years, please God, I shall be able to come over like you did, and be a great artist like you. Good-bye, dear uncle, God bless you.

From your loving nephew, MATTHEW STRANG.

P.S.—When I come over I will change my name if you like, so as not to clash with yours. I know you would not like it if people thought you had done my pictures.

P.P.S.—Besides, my real name now might be Matthew Hailey, as mother has changed hers to that.

This letter evoked no answer.

When Matt's apprenticeship was at an end, the first item of his programme broke down, for he lacked the money to carry him to the States, so he had to stay on at Cattermole's farm at a petty wage, though a larger than Mrs. Cattermole was aware of, till he had scraped a little together. And then an accident occurred that bade fair to dispose of all the other items. He was at work in the saw-mill, when his leg got jammed between the log he was operating upon and the carriage that was bearing it towards the gang of up-and-down saws. There would not be room for his body to pass between the gang of saws and the framework that held them. It was an awful instant. He cried out, but his voice was lost in the roar of the water and the clatter of the machinery. Round went the water-wheel, the carriage glided along, offering inch after inch of the log to the cruel teeth, and Matt was drawn steadily with it towards the fatal point. With an inspiration he drew out the stout string he always carried in his pocket, and, making a noose, threw it towards a lever. It caught, and Matt was saved, for he had only to pull this lever to close the gate in the flume and shut out the water. When the machinery stopped the racket ceased, too, and Matt's voice could be heard, and Cattermole rushed in from the adjoining furniture manufactory, and, knocking away the dogs at the end of the log, lifted it and released the prisoner, and then made him kneel down and offer a prayer for his salvation. Matt's awakening sense of logic dimly insinuated that this was thanking Providence for having failed to mutilate him, but the atmosphere of Puritan acceptance in which he moved and had his being asphyxiated the nascent scepticism.

Shortly after, Matt bade farewell to Cattermole farm, with its complex appurtenances — a proceeding which Mrs. Cattermole christened "onchristian ingratitood." She declared that he ought to strip off the clothes she had made him, and depart naked as he had come. From a dim corner of the kitchen Cattermole's face signalled, "Don't mind her. God bless you."

Softened by the saw-mill accident, Matt tramped to Cobequid to see his mother before departing for Boston, and thence ultimately for England. He felt guilty, a sort of Prodigal Son,

and kept assuring himself of his innocence and economy. The third Mrs. Hailey received him with a rapture that almost surpassed Billy's. She hugged him to her bosom with sobs and told him her grievances. These were manifold, but seemed analyzable into four categories: one, the remissness of Harriet, whose visits were rare, and whose baby had bow-legs; two, the naughtiness of the children, of whom Matt had always been the only satisfactory specimen; three, the cruelty of their step-father in chastising them for the same; four, the deacon's breach of contract in refusing to migrate to Halifax, or to permit her to hold Baptist prayer-meetings. Her black eyes flashed with strange fire when she spoke of her new husband's crimes and derelictions. And there was the old dreaded hysteria in her threats to throw up the position. Evidently remarriage had not made her happy, he thought with added tenderness. Perhaps nothing could. He shuddered at his own deeper perception of unhappiness implanted in temperament and finding nutriment in any conditions.

In conclusion, she besought her boy—the only person in the world who loved her, the only person to whom she could tell her troubles—to go to Halifax instead of the States. It was far nearer, and money could be made just as easily. Her folks lived at Halifax, and though he must not dream of seeking their assistance, for they had been very bad to her, mewing her up strictly so that she had been forced to elope with her poor Davie, still it would be a consolation to know that he was near her own people, likewise not far from herself, in case of anything happening to either of them. Perhaps she would persuade her husband to move there, after all—who knew? Or she might come there herself and stay with him, for a week or two at any rate, and meantime he should write to her about the dear old town. Moved by her lack of reproaches and by her misery, and impressed into his olden subjugation to the handsome, masterful woman, Matt acquiesced. Perhaps his main motives were the comparative cheapness of the journey and the reinflammation of his childish curiosity concerning the gay city.

It was Saturday, but Matt suffered such tortures under the moral but mumbled exordiums of "Ole Hey," of which his un-

accustomed ear took in less than ever, that he determined to depart on the Monday. The deacon seemed to have aged considerably, his beard was matted and thick, and his dicky was stained with tobacco-juice. For the rest, Matt discovered that most of the children were employed about the farm or the works, and that they had ceased to go to school, the deacon having converted Ruth into a school-mistress when she could be spared from keeping the books of his tannery and grist-mill. Ruth herself he met with indifference that the stateliness of her unexpectedly tall presence did nothing to thaw. He was surprised to hear from Billy, whose bed he shared that night, and who was more greedy to hear Matt's adventures than to talk, that they were all very fond of her, and that she could still romp heartily. But Ruth had gradually grown shadowy to his imagination beside his burning dreams of Art, and the sight of her seemed to add the last touch of insubstantiality to her image. And yet, in the boredom of the Sunday services, with his eye roving restlessly about the severe, unlovely meeting-house in search of distractions, he could not but be conscious that she was the sweetest and sedatest figure in the village choir that sang and flirted in the rising tiers of the gallery over the vestibule; and when Deacon Hailey, tapping his tuning-fork on the rails, imitated its note with a rasping croak, Matt had a flash of sympathy with the divined inner life of the girl in this discordant environment. He told her briefly of his plans—to save up enough money to get to his uncle in London, who would doubtless put him in the way of studying Art seriously. She said she wished she had something as fine to live and work for; still she was busy enough, what with book-keeping and teaching school, as she put it smilingly. Their parting, like their meeting, was awkward. Self-consciousness and shyness had come into their simple relation. Neither dared take the initiative of a kiss, which for the rest was a rare caress in Cobequid save between children and lovers. Relatives shook hands; even women were not free of one another's lips. And for the lad's part, timidity was all he felt in the presence of this sweet graceful stranger. Only at the last moment, when she handed him a keepsake in the shape of a prize copy of the *Arabian Nights* her music-

mistress had given her, did their looks meet as of yore, and then it was more the young painter than the old playmate who was touched by the earnest radiance of her eyes and the flicker of rose across the delicate fairness of her cheek. He made a little sketch of her in return, and sent it her from Halifax.

When he was on his way he opened the gilt-bound volume and read on the fly-leaf:

To Matt

From Ruth.

God make you a great artist.

CHAPTER VIII

A WANDER-YEAR

Halifax exceeded Matt's expectations, and gave him a higher opinion of his mother. For the first time his soul received the shock of a great town, or what was a great town to him. The picturesque bustle enchanted him. The harbor, with its immense basin and fiords, swarming with ships and boats, was an inexhaustible pageant, and sometimes across the green water came softened music from a giant iron-clad. High in the background of the steep city that sat throned between its waters rose forests of spruce and fir. From the citadel on the hill black cannon saluted the sunrise, and Sambro Head and Sherbrooke Tower shot rays of warning across the night. The streets throbbed with traffic, and were vivid with the blues and reds of artillery and infantry; and the nigger and the sailor contributed exotic romance. On the wharves of Water Street, which were lined with old shanties and dancing-houses, the black men sawed cord-wood, huge piles of which mounted skyward, surrounded by boxes of smoked herrings. On one of the wharves endless quintals of codfish lay a-drying in the sun. And when the great tide, receding, exposed the tall wooden posts, like the long legs of some many-legged marine monster, covered with black and white barnacles and slime of a beautiful

arsenic green, the embryonic artist found fresh enchantment in this briny, fishy, muddy water-side. Then, too, the Government House was the biggest and most wonderful building Matt had ever seen, and the fish, fruit, and meat markets were a confusion of pleasant noises.

In the newly opened park on the "Point" the wives of the English officials and officers—grand dames, who set the tone of the city—strolled and rode in beautiful costumes. Matt thought that the detached villas in which they lived, with imposing knockers and circumscribing hedges instead of fences, were the characteristic features of great American cities. He loved to watch the young ladies riding into the cricket-ground on their well-groomed horses; beautiful, far-away princesses, whose exquisite figures, revealed by their riding-habits, fascinated rather than shocked his eye, accustomed though it was to the Puritan modesty of ill-fitting dresses, the bulky wrappings of a village where to go out "in your shape" was to betray impure instincts. He would peer into the enclosure with a strange, wistful longing, eager to catch stray music of their speech, silver ripples of their laughter. He wondered if he would ever talk to such celestial creatures, for whom life went so smooth and so fair. What charming pictures they made in the lovely summer days, when the officers played against the club, and they sat on the sward drinking tea under the shady trees, in white dresses, with white lace parasols held over their softly glinting hair to shield the shining purity of their complexions—a refreshing contrast of cool color with the scarlet of the officers' uniforms. Sometimes the wistful eyes of the boy grew dim with sad, delicious tears. How inaccessible was all this beautiful life whose gracious harmonies, whose sweet refinements, some subtle instinct divined and responded to! At moments he felt he could almost barter his dreams of Art to move in these heavenly spheres, among these dainty creatures whose every gesture was grace, whose every tone was ravishment. There was one girl, the most bewitching of all, whom he only saw in the saddle, so that in his image of her, as in his sketches of her, she was always on a beautiful chestnut horse, which she sat with matchless ease and decision; a tall, slender girl, with yellow-brown hair that

lay soft and fluffy about the forehead of her lovely English face. Her favorite canter was along the beach-road; and here, before he had found work, he would loiter in the hope of seeing her. How he longed—yet dreaded—that she might some day perceive his presence; sometimes so high flew his secret audacious dream that in imagination he patted her horse's glossy neck.

In such an exhilarating atmosphere the boy felt great impulses surge within him. But, alas! the seamy side of great cities was borne in on him also. He had a vile lodging in the central slums, near the roof of a tall tenement-house that tottered between two groggeries, and here drunken wharfingers and sailors and negro wenches and Irishmen reeled and swore. To a lad brought up in godly Cobequid, where drunkenness was spoken of with bated breath, this unquestionable supremacy of Satan was both shocking and unsettling. Nevertheless, Matt spent the first days in a trance of delight, for—apart from and above all other wonders — there were picture-shops in the town; and the works of O'Donovan, the local celebrity, were marked at twenty, or thirty, and even fifty dollars apiece. They were sea-paintings of considerable merit, that excited Matt's admiration without quite overwhelming him. On the strength of O'Donovan's colossal prices, Matt invested some of his scanty stock of dollars in a kit of paint at a fairy shop, where shone collapsible tubes of oil-color, such as he had never seen before, and delightful brushes and undreamed-of easels and canvases. He also bought two yellow-covered books, one entitled *Artistic Anatomy*, and the other *Practical House Decoration*, which combined to oppress him with his ignorance of the human form divine and the house beautiful, and became his bed-fellows, serving to raise his pillow. His conceit fell to zero when he saw a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds among the collection in the Session Hall.

After a depressing delay, mitigated only by the sight of his fair horsewoman, he found work in a furniture shop at the top of an old rambling warehouse that was congested with broken litter and old pianos. The proprietor not only dealt in débris

but bought new furniture and had it painted in the loft. Matt received six dollars a week, half of which he saved for his English campaign. At first he had the atelier to himself, but as the proprietor's business increased he was given a subordinate — a full-grown Frenchman, rather shorter than himself, who swore incomprehensibly and was restive under Matt's surveyorship. By this time Matt had learned something of the wisdom of the serpent, so he treated his man to liquor. After the Frenchman had got drunk several times at the expense of his sober superior, he discovered that Matt was his long-lost brother, and peace reigned in the paint-shop.

But Matt did not remain long in Halifax. The Frenchman's jabber of the mushroom millionaires of the States (though he failed to explain his own distance from these golden regions) fired Matt's imagination, and he resolved to go to Boston in accordance with his original programme. He considered he had sufficiently studied his mother's wishes, and her letters had become too incoherent for attention. It was a pain, not a pleasure, to receive them. He was not surprised to learn from Billy's letters that domestic broils were frequent, and that the deacon's proverbial wisdom did not avail to cope with Mrs. Strang's threats of suicide. It was only poor Ruth's girlish sweetness that could bring calm into these household cyclones.

And so one fine evening Matt set sail for the city of culture and "Crœsuses." Everything seemed of good augury. Though the expense of the trip had wellnigh eaten up his savings, his heart was as light as his pocket. He was going only to the States, but he felt that, in quitting his native soil, the voyage to London, the temple of Art, and to his uncle, its high-priest, had begun. The moon shone over the twinkling harbor like a great gold coin, and as the vessel spread its canvas wings and glided out of the confusion of shipping, Matt felt that its name was not the least happy omen in this auspicious moment. The ship was named *The Enterprise.*

That night, finding some confusion about the distribution of bunks, Matt lay down on deck, with *Artistic Anatomy* and *Practical House Decoration* for his pillows, and slept the

sleep of the weary, tempered by a farrago of inconsequent dreams.

When he woke up next morning he rubbed his eyes from more than sleepiness. Halifax seemed still to confront his vision—its hills, its forts, its wharves, George Island, the Point, and the great harbor in which *The Enterprise* rocked gently. What was this hallucination?

He soon discovered that it was reality. There had been a head-wind in the night, and the ship had dropped her anchor in the harbor for safety.

The incident was typical. In the course of the voyage Matt learned to know the captain—a grizzled old sea-dog with the heart of a bitch. The ship was his own, and he sailed it himself to save expense and check dishonesty. There is a proverb about saving a pennyworth of tar, and Captain Bludgeon illustrated it. No man was ever so unfitted to walk the quarter-deck. His idea of navigation was to hug the coast, and he seized every pretext for putting in at creeks or ports and anchoring for the night, when the crew would go ashore and come back incapable. The schooner itself was an old tub, a cumbrous, dingey-like craft, but sound in timber. Matt had a rough time, though the reading of the *Arabian Nights* made the voyage enchanted. The passengers were a plebeian crowd—a score of women, mostly servant-girls and single, fifteen men emigrating to the States, and a few children. There were only six bunks. The mate had given up his state-room—which Matt was to have shared—to some of the women. Those who could not secure bunks herded dressed in a big field bed, which also accommodated some of the men, likewise sleeping in their clothes. For toilet operations all the women resorted to the state-room, which held a mirror and washing apparatus. Etiquette was free-and-easy. The food was horrible, the cook's menus being almost ingenious in their unpalatableness. Fortunately most of the passengers were sick already. Matt had no immunity. All the pangs of his first pipe were repeated, without the moral qualms which rationalized those. He continued to sleep on deck as often as he could, making friends with the stars; when the night was too chilly he couched on

the wood-pile near the stove. Thus was he spared licentious spectacles, and his innocence was granted a little longer term. They passed the signals and flag-staff of Sable Point safely, Captain Bludgeon's face as white as the breakers that girdled its barren rock; then, instead of making a bee-line for Boston, the captain fetched a semicircle, following the New England coast line, and holding on to the apron-strings of his mother earth. Such voyaging he conceived to be sure, if slow; mistakenly enough, considering the iron-bound character of the coast.

The passengers—once they had got over their sickness—did not complain, for they had the leisure of poverty, and the prospect of indefinite board and lodging was not unpleasing, and their frequent stopping-places diversified the monotony of the voyage with little excursions. One night, having been driven into harbor by a capful of wind, they witnessed the torch-light fishing. It was a scene that set Matt's fingers itching for the brush—waving torches glittering on the water from dozens of boats, and lighting up the tanned faces of the fishers, who were scooping up the herrings with nets. Every detail gave him the keenest joy—the wavering refractions in the water, the leaping silver of the fish touched with gold flame, the sombre mystery of sea and sky above and around. The night was made even more memorable, for some of the girls who had landed brought back in giggling triumph many bundles of cured herrings, which they had pilfered from an unguarded smoke-house, and these they generously distributed, so that the whole ship supped deliciously in defiance of the cook.

On another occasion—in the afternoon at high-water—Matt and about a score of the passengers, the majority females, went on shore to pick gray-beards, as they called the gray cranberries that grew in the swamps. And they tarried so long that when they came back to the boat they found the tide turned, and two hundred yards of mud between them and the water. One of the men tried the mud, and sank to the knees in slimy batter. In the end there was nothing for it but to launch the empty boat, and then wade to it. The launching was easy, the boat slipping along as on grease, but the sequel was boisterous. Jack Floss, a strapping Anglo-Saxon with a blond mustache and

a devil-may-care humor, set the example of giving a woman a pick-a-back to save her skirts, and the few other men followed suit, returning again and again for fresh freight. The air resounded with hysterical giggling and screaming as the women frantically clutched their bearers, some of whom extorted unreluctant kisses under jocose threats of tumbling their burdens over into the mud. One or two actually carried out their threats, by involuntarily stepping suddenly into a gutter worn by the rains and sinking up to the waist, but the mishaps abated no jot of the madcap merriment — it rather augmented the rowdiness as the women were hauled from their mud-baths. For his part Matt waded warily, more conscious of the responsibility than of the fun, for he was doing his duty manfully, as became a lad stout, sturdy, and sixteen. His second burden was a slim, pretty servant-girl named Priscilla, and when he was depositing her, speckless, in the boat, she took the opportunity of the embrace to kiss him in hearty gratitude. Matt dropped her like a hot coal. He felt scorched and flustered, and had a bewildered moment of burning blushes ere he ploughed his way back to rescue another of the distressed damsels. That sudden kiss was an epoch in his growth. A discomfort at the time, the after-taste of it lent new warmth to his interest in the royal amours of the *Arabian Nights*. In his dreams he bore delectable Eastern princesses across perilous magic marshes, and their gratitude found him stockish no longer.

The next episode in this curious creeping voyage was superficially more critical for Matt. A sudden gale upset all poor Captain Bludgeon's calculations. He was near shore as usual, and tried to beat into harbor almost under bare poles; but the haven was of a dangerous entrance, narrow and choked in the throat by a rock, and no one on board had sufficient seamanship to get the schooner in. The mate advised abandoning the hope of harbor, and setting the jib and the jib-foresail to make leeway. The captain swore by everything unholy he would not go a cable farther out to sea. The night was closing in, but, the wind dying away, *The Enterprise* anchored outside the harbor. But in the night the wind sprang up from the opposite quarter fiercer than ever, and the vessel dragged her

anchors and drove towards the rock that squatted on guard at the mouth of the harbor, pitching helplessly in the shifting troughs. In the inky blackness great swamping waves carried off her boats, her top-sails, and both houses. Her anchors were left behind her, and part of the bulwarks was likewise torn away. Fortunately her cables held out as she drove bumping along, though they did not moderate her pace sufficiently to prevent her keel being partially torn away when she bumped upon a reef. Yet she jolted over the reef and drifted blindly on and on, none knew whither.

Within the schooner the scene was almost as wild as without. The women's screams rivalled those of the wind; the distracted creatures ran up and down the companion-ladder, getting in the way of the crew; the captain went below to quiet them—and did not return. Apparently he preferred the society of his own sex. The mate, thus left in command, boarded up the companion-way to stop the aimless scurrying, and told off some of the crew to help him unload the cargo, which consisted of plaster, and to pitch it overboard. Matt and the cook bore a hand in the work. Not daring to unhatch for fear of being water-logged, they had to pass the plaster through the lazaret.

Jack Floss did his best to comfort the females by profanities. He laughed, and hoped the Lord would damn the old hulk, whose fleas were big enough to swim ashore on. His cool blasphemies calmed some, but others plainly regarded him as a Jonah. Matt was half perturbed, half fascinated by this unconventional vagabond; of the real danger his own buoyancy made light.

When the morning light came at last, it showed that they had providentially skirted the grim rock and were drifting into harbor. The deck was covered with débris and with sand, which the ship had stirred and raked up in her dragging progress along the shallow waters. Piles of grit had accumulated in the corners, and the waves on which she tossed were discolored with dirt. Very soon she passed a little island where a brig lay moored; and with great difficulty—for the sea was still running high—the brig sent her a hawser and made her fast. Then they

were enabled to realize further the extent of their luck, for the harbor was strewn with wreckage. No fewer than seven schooners had gone down, and only two men had been saved. The harbor was alive with boats looking for the dead. Captain Bludgeon, bestriding his desolate quarter-deck, congratulated himself on his seamanship. He arranged with a tug to draw *The Enterprise* back to St. John, New Brunswick, for repairs. The few impatient passengers who could afford to pay an extra fee went on to Boston by the rescuing brig, but the majority stuck to *The Enterprise* and Captain Bludgeon, who was compelled to board and lodge them at a cheap water-side hotel while the schooner was laid up. Thus were the fates kind to these waifs on the ocean of life, who enjoyed the holiday after their manner—plain living and high jinks—and had no need of Satan, or even Jack Floss, to find mischief for their idle hands to do.

Matt, however, was not of the roysterers. He had remained with *The Enterprise*, of course, not having the money to exchange; but the scenery of a new town—and that a hill-girt town like St. John, with a cathedral, a silver water, and a forest afire with flowers—was always sufficient business for him. The cathedral was not so colossal as it had loomed to his childish fancy through McTavit's reminiscences. After a day or two Matt found an even more delightful occupation. He happened to remark to Jack Floss that the ceiling of the hotel sitting-room would be all the better for a little ornamentation, and that worthy straightway sought out the proprietor, a gentleman of Scotch descent, and expressed himself so picturesquely that Matt was offered a dollar to make the ceiling worthy of being sat under by artistic souls like Jack Floss. Thereupon Jack Floss and everybody else, except Matt, were turned out of the sitting-room, and the boy, guided by his *Practical House Decoration* in the mixing of colors and the preparation of plaster, stood on the ladder and stencilled one of his imaginative medleys. His fellow-passengers were not permitted to see it till it was ready, but speculation was rife, and the rumor of its glories had spread about the water-side, and on show-day the room was packed with motley spectators, gazing reverently heav-

enward as at fireworks, some breaking out into rapturous exclamations that made the boy more hot and uncomfortable than even the damsel's kiss had done. He was glad he was almost invisible, squeezed into a corner by the crowd. And despite his discomfort, aggravated by a crick in the back of the neck, due to painting with his hand over his head, there was a subtle pleasure for him in his fellow-passengers' facile recognition of the torch-light fishing scene which formed the centre of the decorations. The hotel bar did good business that day.

Just before *The Enterprise* started again for Boston a man came to see the ceiling, and immediately offered the artist a commission. There was a paint-shop in the railway-carriage works, and Matt could have a situation just vacant there at ten dollars a week. Dazzled by these fabulous terms, which seemed almost to realize his ambition at a bound, Matt accepted; and *The Enterprise*, patched up and refitted, sailed without him. A few hours later he discovered that it had also sailed without Priscilla, that seductive young person having found a berth as chamber-maid in the hotel. She came into Matt's room to tidy up, and expressed her joy at the prospect of looking after his comfort. But the boy told her he must seek less comfortable quarters, and, despite her protests and her offers to help him temporarily, he departed for cheaper lodgings, leaving behind him a perfunctory promise to call and see her soon. Jack Floss, whom Matt gratefully regarded as the architect of his fortunes, had half a mind to stay behind, too. He said he wanted to go under, and *The Enterprise* didn't seem to have any luck. But at the last moment he found that he could not desert the ladies.

Matt was more sorry to part from him than from Priscilla; there was something in the young man's devil-may-care manner that appealed to the germs of Bohemianism in the artistic temperament. The young artist had, however, an unpleasant reminder of the defects of the Bohemian temperament, for Jack Floss was forced to confess that he had lost the copy of the *Arabian Nights* which he had persuaded Matt to lend him to beguile the tedium of the days of waiting. The boy was grievously distressed by the loss; it seemed an insult to Ruth Hailey and a misprision of her kindly wishes. However, it

was no use crying over spilled milk, and Jack Floss slightly assuaged his chagrin by fishing out from among his miscellaneous effects a volume of Shelley in small type, and another—with an even more microscopic text—containing the complete works of Lord Byron. Both books opened as by long usage at their most erotic pages. Through these ivory gates the boy passed into the great world of romantic poetry. Whole stanzas remained in his memory. The brain that had refused to retain Bible verses, spending hours in quest of the tiniest, absorbed the sensuous images of the poets without effort; he fell asleep with them on his lips.

In the railway-carriage shop — a spacious saloon as full of painters as an atelier in the Quartier Latin—Matt was allowed a free hand on great canvases that, when filled with flowers and landscapes, were nailed to the roofs of the carriages by electro-plated pins. He also decorated the wooden panels with scroll-work and foliage, and gilded the lettering outside the doors. Thus was the citizen fed on art at every turn, standing under his ceiling, or sitting on his chair, or lying on his sofa, or travelling on his railway. Art is notoriously elevating; but as the depraved quarters of the town continued to flourish, the art must have been bad.

Matt's career in the paint-shop was neither so long nor so pleasant as he had anticipated. His pictures did not please his fellow-artists as much as his employers, and he became the butt of the place. A series of impalpable irritations almost too slight for analysis, subtle with that devilish refinement of which coarseness is only capable when it is cruel, rendered his life intolerable. Matt's vocabulary was too mincing for his fellow-craftsmen; they resented his absence of expletives, though imperceptibly he succumbed to the polluted atmosphere which had surrounded him ever since he set foot in Halifax; and the boy, whose mind was stored with lovely images and ethereal lyrics, began to bespatter his talk with meaningless oaths. Nor was this his only coquetry with corruption, for the daily taunt of "milksop" conspired with the ferment of youth.

"Varnishing-day" was his day of danger. It was pay-day, and Matt had boundless money. It was also the hardest day

of the six, the wind-up, when all the work of the week was varnished in an atmosphere of sixty degrees; and the poor lad, drunk with the fumes of turpentine, sticky from head to foot, his face besplashed, his eyes stinging, his nose red, and his brain dizzy, threw off his apron and overalls, and reeled to the door, and groped his way into the streets to breathe in the glorious fresh air, and revel like the rest of his fellows in the joy of life—aye, and the joy of license, the saturnalia of Saturday night. For the glorious fresh air soon palled, and in the evening Matt was dragged by his mates to a species of music-hall in a hotel near the harbor, where, in a festive reek of bad tobacco and worse whiskey, he repeated the choruses of winking soubrettes, dubious refrains whose inner meaning the brag and badinage of the workshop had made obscurely clear. But disgust invariably supervened; Byron and Shelley were his Sunday reading, and under the spell of their romantic song, which chimed with his soul's awakening melodies, he revolted against his low-minded companions, hating himself for almost sinking to their level.

He felt that he inhabited a rarer ether; he was conscious of a curious aloofness, not only from them, but from humanity at large, and yet here he was joining in their coarse conviviality. To such a mood the accidental turning up of an old sketch of his Halifax divinity on her horse appealed as decisively as an accidental text was wont to appeal to his mother. The beautiful curves of her figure, the purity of her complexion, rebuked him. Perhaps it was because he was an artist that his soul was touched through the concrete. In a spasm of acuter disgust, and in a confidence of higher destinies, he threw up his berth.

He had saved twenty dollars—twenty stout planks between him and the deep. But the luck that had been his hitherto deserted him. In six weeks he had only one fortunate fortnight, when he carried the hod for a house-joiner, and was nearly choked by the veering round of a little ladder, through which he had popped his head in mounting a bigger.

One by one his twenty planks slipped from under him, and then he found himself struggling in the lowest depths. The

few dollars he had squandered on the music-hall haunted him with added reproach.

Too proud to beg or to go back to the paint-shop or to write to his mother, his only possessions his clothes and a box of cheap water-colors he carried with his slim library in his jacket pockets, he searched the streets for an odd job, or stood about the wharves amid the stevedores and negroes to earn a copper by unasked assistance in rolling casks into warehouses, till at last, when the cathedral lawn was carpeted with autumn leaves, the streets became his only lodging. Hungry and homeless, he was beginning to regret his hut in the woods, and to meditate a retreat from civilization, for in the frosty nights that shadowed the genial autumn days this unsheltered life was not pleasant, when, by one of those strokes of fortune which fall to the most unfortunate, he found a night-refuge. A fellow-lodger of his at the Hotel of the Beautiful Star, a glass-blower out of work with whom he had once halved his evening bread, fell into employment, and gratefully offered him the nocturnal hospitality of the factory. Here, voluptuously couched on warm white sand, piles and barrels of which lay all about, the boy forgot the gnawing emptiness of his stomach and the forlornness of his situation in the endless fascination of the weird effects of light and shade. It was a vast place, dim despite its gas-jets, mysterious with shadowy black corners. The red flannel shirts of the men struck a flamboyant note of color in the duskiness; the stokers were outlined in red before the roaring furnaces, the blowers were bathed in a dazzling white glow from the glass at the end of their blow-pipes, so that their brawny bare arms and the sweat on their brows stood out luridly. With every movement, with every flickering and waning light, there was a changing play of color. Matt would lie awake in his corner, taking mental notes, or recording the action of muscles by the pencilled silhouette of some picturesque figure rolling the pliant glass. Great painters, he thought, in his boyish ignorance, worked from imagination on a basis of memory; but he was not strong enough yet to dispense with observation, though observation always brought despair of his power to catch the ever-shifting subtleties of living nature. In

the enthralment of these studies, and in his sensuous delight in the Dantesque effects, Matt often omitted to sleep altogether. And sometimes, on that background of ruddy gloom, other visions opened out to the boy dreaming on his bed of sinuous sand; the real merged into the imaginative, and this again into the fantasies of delicious drowsihead. The walls fell away, the factory blossomed into exotic realms of romance; peerless houris, ripe in womanhood, passed over moon-silvered waters in gliding caïques; prisoned princesses, pining for love, showed dark starry eyes behind the lattice-work of verandas; pensive maidens, divinely beautiful, wandered at twilight under crescent moons rising faint and ghostly behind groves of cedars.

London, too, figured in the pageantry of his dreams, glittering like a city of the *Arabian Nights*, ablaze with palaces, athrob with music; and perched on the top of the tallest cupola, on the loftiest hill, stood his uncle Matthew, holding his paint-brush like a sceptre, king of the realm of Art. Hark! was that not the king's trumpeters calling, calling him to the great city, calling him to climb up and take his place beside the sovereign? Oh, the call to his youth, the clarion call, summoning him forth to toils and triumphs in some enchanted land! Oh, the seething of the young blood that thronged the halls of dream with loveliness, and set seductive faces at the casements of sleep, and sanctified his waking reveries with prescient glimpses of a sweet spirit-woman waiting in some veiled recess of space and time to partake and inspire his consecration to Art! The narrow teachings of his childhood—the conception of a vale of tears and temptation—shrivelled away like clouds melting into the illimitable blue, merging in a vast sense of the miracle of a beautiful world, a world of infinitely notable form and color. And this expansion of his horizon accomplished itself almost imperceptibly because the oppression of that ancient low-hanging heaven overbrooding earth, of that sombre heaven lying over Cobequid Village like a pall, was not upon him, and he was free to move and breathe in an independence that made existence ecstasy, even at its harshest. So that, though he walked in hunger and cold, he walked under triumphal arches of rainbows.

CHAPTER IX

ARTIST AND PURITAN

But the dauntless, practical youth lay beneath the dreamer, even as the Puritan lay beneath the artist. Matt could not consent to live on his host, the glass-blower, who shared his lunch with him — in the middle of the night — and he was almost reduced to applying again at the paint-shop, when the captain of a schooner gave him a chance to work his way to Economy, on the basin of Minas, twenty-five miles below Cobequid Village. Matt had to make up his mind in a hurry, for this was the last ship bound north before the bay was frozen for the winter, and ships bound south for the States seemed always to have a plethora of crew. The mental conflict added to the pains of the situation; to go north again was to confess defeat. But was it not a severer defeat to lessen a poor man's lunch, even although he accepted only a minimum on the pretext of not being hungry? This reflection decided him; though he had no prospects in Economy, and nothing to gain but a few days' food and shelter, he agreed informally to ship and to help load the schooner at nightfall. He would have preferred to go on board at once, were it only to dine off a ship's biscuit; but no one suspected his straits, and so he had an afternoon of sauntering.

On the hilly outskirts of the city he was stopped by a stylish young lady, so dazzling in dress and beauty that for a moment he did not recognize Priscilla. A fashionable crinoline, and a full-sleeved astrakhan sacque, together with an afghan muffler round her throat, had given the slim chambermaid an imposing portliness. An astrakhan toque, with a waving red feather, was set daintily on her head, and below the

sacque her gown showed magnificent with bows and airy flounces. Evidently her afternoon out.

"Good land!" she cried. "What have you been up to?"

"Nothing. I'm in a hurry," he said, flushing shamefacedly as he passed hastily on.

But Priscilla caught him by the hem of his jacket.

"Don't look so skairt! Why haven't you been to see me all this time?"

"Too busy," he murmured.

"Too proud, I reckon. I thought you'd come for to look at your decorations, anyways; let's go right along there; you ain't lookin' as smart as a cricket, that's a fact; I'll make you a glass o' real nice grog to pick you up some."

He shook his head. "I'm going away—I'm off to Economy."

"Scat! You want to give me the mitten. Why don't you speak straight? You don't like me."

She looked at him, half provoked, half provokingly.

He looked at her with his frank, boyish gaze; he noted the red curve of her pouting lips, the subtle light in her eyes, the warm coloring of the skin, shadowed at the neck by waves of soft brown hair, in which the beads of a chenille net glistened bluishly; he was pleasured by the brave note of the red feather against the shining black of the toque, the piquant relation of the toque to the face, and he thought how delightful it would be to transfer all these tones and shades to canvas. He forgot to answer her; he tried to store up the complex image in his memory.

"I'm glad you don't deny it," she said, her angry face belying her words.

He started. "Oh yes, I like you well enough," he said, awkwardly.

Her face softened archly. "Then why don't you come an' see me? I won't bite you!"

"I'm sorry! I'm sailing to-night."

"I guess you ain't!" She smiled imperious solicitation. "What are you goin' to do in Economy? Why don't you stick to the paint-shop?"

"I've left there way back in the summer."

"What made you leave?"

"Oh, well!"

"Then you ain't got no money?" There was tender concern in her tones.

"Not hardly."

"How many meals have you had to-day?"

He had a flash of resentment. "Don't you worry about me," he said, gruffly.

"Bother!" said Priscilla, contemptuously, though her voice faltered. "You're jest goin' to come along and have a good square meal."

"No, I'm not. I'm not hungry any."

"Oh, Matt! Where *do* you expect to go to?" said Priscilla, with a roguish, disarming smile.

"Not with you," rejoined Matt, smiling in response.

Priscilla laughed heartily. The white teeth gleamed roguishly against the full red lips.

"Come along," she said, with good-humored conclusiveness.

He shook a smiling head. "I'm going to Economy."

"You're comin' with me; the boss 'll stand you a dinner for repairin' your decorations."

"Why, what's wrong with them?" he asked, anxiously.

He knew from his book how liable such things were to decay.

"Oh, the centre of the ceilin' is a bit off color. That silly old owl of a Cynthia spilt a pail of water on the floor above."

"You don't say!" he cried, in concern.

"Honest Injun! I was jest mad. You could get lots to do if you would stay at our shanty."

"I'll come and put the ceiling right," he said, indecisively; and, giving her his hand with shy awkwardness, was promenaded in triumph through the dignified streets. He felt a thrill of romance as this dazzling person clasped his hand clingingly. He wondered how she dared be seen with so shabby a being; the juxtaposition had a touch of the *Arabian Nights*, of the amorous adventures of his day-dreams; it was like a princess wooing a pauper. They passed other couples better matched—some in the first stage of courtship, some in the second. In the first

stage the female and the male walked apart—she near the wall talking glibly, he at the edge of the sidewalk, silent, gazing straight ahead in apparent disconnection. In the second stage the lovers walked closer together, but now both gazed straight ahead, and both were silent; only if one looked between them one saw two red hands clasped together, like the antennæ of two insects in conversation. When Priscilla and Matt met pairs in this advanced stage, her hand tightened on his, and she sidled nearer. It was like a third stage, and Matt's sense of romance was modified by a blushing shamefacedness.

As they entered the hotel Matt made instinctively towards the sitting-room to see his damaged decorations; but Priscilla, protesting that he must feed first, steered him hurriedly up-stairs into his old apartment. He was too faint with hunger to resist her stronger will.

"There, you silly boy!" she said, affectionately, depositing him in a chair before the stove, which she lighted. "Now you jest set there while I tell the boss." She lingered a moment to caress his dark hair; then, stooping down suddenly, she kissed him and fled.

Matt's heart beat violently, the blood hustled in his ears. The sense of romance grew stronger, but mingled therewith was now an uneasy, indefinable apprehension of the unknown. The magnetism of Priscilla repelled as much as it drew him; his romance was touched with vague terror. Yet as the fire vivified the bleak bedroom, with its text-ornamented walls, the warm curves of the girl's face painted themselves on the air, subtly alluring.

Priscilla herself was back soon, bearing some cold victual and some hot grog, and watched with tender satisfaction the boy's untroubled appetite. She drank a little, too, when he was done, and they clinked glasses, and Matt felt it was all very wicked and charming. Stanzas of Shelley and Byron pulsed in his memory, tropical flowers of speech blossomed in his brain.

But only weeds sprouted out. "It was real good of you, Priscilla, to speak to the boss. I'd better see to the ceiling at once."

"Oh, don't; it can wait till to-morrow."

"But I promised to go aboard to-night."

"You nasty feller, you're goin' to shake me, after all."

"Don't say that, Priscilla," he said, shyly. "I only wish I could do something to show my gratitude to you."

"No, you don't." Priscilla's bosom heaved, and tears were in her eyes.

"Yes, I do."

"You don't like me."

"I do."

"You don't think I'm pretty."

She had removed her things now, revealing the natural gracefulness of her figure.

"Oh, Priscilla!" said Matt, looking at her. "Why, I'd give anything if I could—" He paused, timidly.

"Well, why can't you?" interrupted Priscilla, her face very close to his.

"I'm not good enough yet. And the light's failing."

"Why! What do you want of the light?"

"I can't paint so well by night. The color looks different in the day. But I'd give anything to be able to paint something as pretty as you."

Priscilla swept her glass aside, pettishly.

"Lan' sakes, what a boy! Pictures, pictures, pictures! If it ain't the ceilin', it's me! There are better things on this earth than pictures, Matt."

Matt shook his head, with a sceptical smile.

Priscilla looked disconcerted. "Why, didn't you say I was prettier than a picture, Matt?"

"Oh, that's different," he parried, feebly; then, feeling her fascination lulling him to forgetfulness of the price to be paid for his dinner, as well as of the mute appeal of his damaged designs, he jumped up. "I'd best see to the ceiling before it's too late. I wonder if they've kept the materials handy."

"Set down, Matt."

"Oh, but I mustn't cheat the boss."

"Who's talkin' o' cheatin'? This is *my* treat."

"Oh, but it ain't right o' you, Priscilla," he protested.

"Never mind; when I'm down on my luck you shall do as much for me."

"I'll send you half a dollar from Economy," he said, resolutely. Then, smiling to temper his ungraciousness, he added, "Short reckonings make long friends, hey?—as an old deacon I knew used to say. I guess I'll go down-stairs now, Priscilla."

"What for? You haven't got to go aboard till nightfall?"

"You're forgetting the ceiling. I kind o' want to touch it up all the same."

"You silly boy," she said, with a fond smile, "that was only my fun."

"Priscilla!" He stared at her in reproachful amazement. Was his incurable trust in humanity always to be shaken thus?

"Don't look so solemn."

"But you told me a fib!"

"Scat! D' you think I was goin' to let you fool around on an empty stomach?"

"But you told me a lie." The boy towered over her like an irate judgment-angel.

Priscilla had a happy thought. "But you told *me* a lie. You said you warn't hungry."

Matt looked startled.

"Oh, but that—that was different," he stammered again.

"Can't see it. Tit for tat."

Matt pondered in silence.

Priscilla rose. "Set down," she said, soothingly, and the boy, feeling confusedly guilty, let himself be pressed down into his seat.

Priscilla nestled to him, sharing his chair, and pressing her soft cheek to his.

"Was he mad with his poor little Priscilla?" she cooed. "No, he mustn't be angry, bless his handsome face."

Matt was not angry any longer, but he was uncomfortable. He tried to whip up his sense of romance, to feel what he felt in reading love-poetry, to fancy that he was sitting with a pensive princess in a cedar grove under a crescent moon. But he

could only feel that Priscilla was a real terrestrial person, and mendacious at that.

Priscilla's lips sought his in a long kiss. "You *are* fond o' me, Matt, aren't you?" she murmured, coaxingly.

Matt's conscience checked conventional response. He faltered, slowly: "I guess you're real good to me."

A moment later the door opened. Priscilla sprang up hurriedly, and, to be doing something, noisily pulled down the roller-blind.

"That you, Cynthia?" she said, carelessly.

"Yes, it's me," grumbled the old woman. "You're wanted down-stairs."

"In a jiffy. I'm just lighting Mr. Strang's candles," she said, fumbling about for them in the darkness she had herself produced.

"Raythor early," croaked Cynthia.

"Yes, Mr. Strang wants to paint; there ain't enough light to see by," replied Priscilla, glibly, while Matt felt his cheeks must surely be visible by the light of their own glow.

The candles were lit, and Priscilla, ostentatiously running into the next room, returned with a sheet of white paper. "There you are, Mr. Strang!" she cried, cheerfully, adding in a whisper, "I'll be back presently. You won't go to-night, will you?" And her eyes pleaded amorously.

No sooner had Priscilla disappeared than Matt's perception of romance in the position began to return; but it was an impersonal, artistic perception; he was but a spectator of the situation. He could not understand his own apathetic aloofness.

He walked restlessly about the room, trying to pump up Byronic emotion, but finding the well of sentiment strangely dry. His eye wandered to the blind, and became censoriously absorbed in the crude flowers and figures stamped upon the arsenic-green background; he studied the effects of the candle-light on the glaring coloration, noting how the yellow roses had turned pink. Then Priscilla's face flew up amid the flare of flowers, and Matt, seizing the sheet of paper and pulling out his paint-box, forgot everything else, even the artificial light, in the task of expressing Priscilla in water-color.

He had nearly finished the sketch, which glowed with dainty vitality, though the figure came out too lady-like. Suddenly the sound of voices broke upon his ear. Priscilla and Cynthia were talking outside his door.

His critical situation recurred to him in a flash, his broken promise to the captain if he yielded to the pertinacious Priscilla. The artist's imagination might enflame; the crude actuality chilled, curiosity alone persisting. And the latent Puritan leaped up at bay; far-away reminiscences of whispered references to the flesh and the devil resurged, with all that mystic flavor of chill, unspeakable godlessness that attaches to sins dimly apprehended in childhood. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," seen suddenly in red letters on one of the wall-texts, was like the voice of a minatory Providence. Poor Priscilla became an advancing serpent, dragging insidious coils.

He shut up his paint-box hastily, and scribbling beneath the sketch, "For Priscilla—with Matt's thanks," he puffed at the candles. Only one went out. Priscilla was still talking outside. His heart was thumping with excitement as he added in a corner: "I promised the captain. Good-bye." Then, blowing out the other candle, he waited, striving to draw serener breath as Priscilla still dallied without.

Only a blurred glimmer showed through the isinglass of the stove door; the room was quite dark. He began to hope she would ascend with Cynthia, and leave the coast temporarily clear; but at last only Cynthia's step receded, and he heard Priscilla turning the door-handle. It was an anxious moment. He heard her exclamation of surprise.

"Have you gone to bed?" she cried.

He held his breath as she grazed his sleeve in the darkness. Then he glided out, and slid boyishly down the banisters like a flash. There was a gay hubbub of voices in the saloon; he walked unquestioned into the street, then ran (as if pursued by a horde of Amazons) till he reached the docks, and saw the friendly vessel moored against the wharf.

Remorse for his balked romance set in severely as soon as the bustle of loading was over and the anchor weighed; Pris-

cilla took on the halo of Byronism and the *Arabian Nights* which had steadily absented itself in practice. Often during that miserable voyage he called himself a fool and a milksop; for the passage was a nightmare of new duties, complicated by sea-sickness and the weakness of a half-starved constitution, and on that swinging schooner, with its foul-mouthed captain, the mean bedroom he had deserted showed like a stable paradise. But blustrous as the captain was by the side of the blubbering Bludgeon, he had his compensations, for he made the voyage before the few passengers had found their sea-legs. Arrived in Economy, Matt was again face to face with starvation. But here Fortune smiled—with a suspicion of humor in her smile; and having already climbed masts and ladders for his dinner, her protégé was easily tempted to seek it at the top of a steeple. The steeple, after tapering to a point two hundred feet high, was crowned by a ball, which for years had needed regilding. Unfortunately the architect had made the ball almost inaccessible, but Matt, being desperate, undertook the job. The breath of winter was already on the town; a week more and the whole steeple would be decorated for the season with snow, so Matt's offer was accepted, and, his boots equipped with creepers, the young steeple-jack, begirt with ropes, made the ascent safely in the eye of the admiring populace, lowered the great ball and then himself, and being thereupon given board and lodging and materials, he gilded it in the privacy of his garret. Thus become a public hero, Matt easily got through the winter. He decorated the ceiling of the Freemasons' Hall, and painted a portrait of the member of the House of Assembly, a burly farmer. This was his first professional experience of an actual sitter, and he found himself more hampered than helped by too close contact with reality. However, a touch of imagination does no harm to a portrait, and Matt had by this time acquired sufficient experience of humanity to lean to beauty's side even apart from his youthful tendency to idealization, which made it impossible for him at this period to paint anything that was not superficially beautiful or picturesque. The member pronounced the portrait life-like, and gave Matt a bushel of home-grown potatoes over and above the stipulated price, which was board

and lodging during the period of painting, and an order on a store for two dollars. With the order Matt purchased a pair of Congress or side-spring boots; the potatoes he swopped for a box of paper collars. From Economy he wrote home to his mother, and received an incoherent letter, in which she denounced the deacon by the aid of fulminant texts. Matt sighed impotently, pitying her from his deeper experience of life, but hoping she got on better with "Ole Hey" than she imagined. He had half a mind to look up his folks, especially poor Billy; but just then he got an order from the farmer-deputy's brother, who wrote that he was so pleased with his brother's portrait that he wished Matt to paint his sign-board. He added that, although he had not seen any specimen of Matt's sign-writing, he felt confident the painter of that portrait would be a competent person. Matt accepted the new task with mixed feelings, and got so many other commissions from the shopkeepers (for every shop had its movable sign-board) that he soon saved fifty dollars, and seemed on the high sea to England and his uncle. He had fixed three hundred dollars as the minimum with which he might safely go to London to study art. The steerage passage would cost only twenty. Unfortunately he was persuaded to invest his savings in a partnership with a Yankee jewel-peddler, and to travel the country with him. The peddler did not swindle his partner, merely his clients; but Matt was so disgusted that he refused to remain in the business. Thereupon the peddler, freed from the obligations of partnership, treated him as an outsider, and refused to return his principal. Matt thought himself lucky to escape in the end with twenty-five dollars and a cleansed conscience. He went back to sign-painting, but, taking a hint from the Yankee, continued his travels, and became a peddler-painter. He hated the work, was out of sympathy with his prosaic sitters, wondering by virtue of what grace or loveliness they sought survival on canvas; but the road to Art, by way of his uncle in London, lay over their painted bodies, so he drudged along. And yet when the sitter was dissatisfied with the picture—it was generally the sitter's friends who persuaded him that he was dissatisfied—and when Matt had to listen to the fatuous criticisms of farmers and store-keepers, the artist flared up, and more than

once the hot-blooded boy sacrificed dollars to dignity. He was astonished to find that in many quarters his fame had preceded him, and more astonished to discover finally that the advance advertiser was his late partner. Whether the Yankee compounded thus for the use of Matt's dollars Matt never knew, but in his kinder thought of the cute peddler the boy came to think himself the debtor. For the dollars mounted, one on the head of another, and the heap rose higher and higher, day by day and week by week, till at last the magic three hundred began to loom in the eye of hope. Three hundred dollars! saved by the sweat of the brow and semi-starvation, and sanctified by the blood and tears of youth; sweet to count over and to dream over, and to pile up like a tower to scale the skies.

And so the great day drew near when Matt Strang would sail across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER X

EXODUS

Billy Strang was dreaming happy dreams — dreams of action and adventure, in which he figured not as the morbid cripple, but as the straight-limbed hero. Matt was generally with him in these happy hunting-grounds of sleep — dear old Matt, who had become a creature of dream to his waking life. But absorbed as Billy was in this phantasmagoric happiness, he was still the sport of every unwonted sound from the real world. His tremulous nerves quivered at the first shock, ready to flash back to his brain the bleaker universe of aches and regrets and rancorous household quarrels.

To-night he sat up suddenly, with a premonition of something strange, and gazed into the darkness of the bedroom, seeing only the dim outline of the other bed in which his two younger brothers slept. After a long moment of mysterious rustling, a thin ray of light crept in under the door, then the handle turned very softly, and his mother glided in swiftly,

bearing a candle that made a monstrous shadow follow and bend over her. She was fully dressed in out-door attire, wearing her bonnet and sacque and muffler.

Her eyes were wide with excitement and shone weirdly, and the whole face wore an uncanny look.

Billy trembled in cold terror. His mouth opened gaspingly.

"Sh-h-h-h!" whispered his mother, putting a forefinger to her lips. Then, in hurried accents, she breathed, "Quick, get up and dress to oncet!"

Magnetized by her face, he slipped hastily from the bed, too awed to question.

"Sh-h-h-h!" she breathed again, "or you'll wake Ruth." Then, moving with the same noiseless precipitancy, her shadow now growing to giant, now dwindling to dwarf, "Quick, quick, children!" she whispered, shaking them. The two younger boys sat up, dazed by sleep and the candle, and were silently bundled out of bed, yawning and blinking, and automatically commencing to draw on the socks they found thrust into their hands.

"Your best clothes," she whispered to Billy, throwing open the cupboard in which they hung.

The action seemed to loosen his tongue.

"But it ain't Sunday," he breathed.

"Sh-h-h-h! To-day is a holiday. Put them on quick, quick!" she replied, in the same awful whisper. "We are goin' out of the land of bondage in haste with our loins girded. And lo! in the mornin' in every house there was one dead."

She set down the candle on the little bare wooden table, where it gleamed solemnly in the gaunt room. Then she fell to feverishly helping the children to dress, darting violently from one to another, and half paralyzing Billy, whose fumbling, freezing fingers could not keep pace with her frantic impatience. He dropped a boot, and the sound seemed to echo through the silent house like a diabolical thunder-clap. He cowered before her blazing eyes as she picked up the boot and violently dumped his foot into it.

"Are we goin' out, mother?" he said, so as not to scream. His words sounded sinister and terrible to himself.

"Yes; I'll go an' see if the girls are finished dressin'." She took up the candle, and her whisper grew sterner. "Don't make a sound!"

"But where are we goin', mother?" he said, to detain her for an instant.

"Goin' home. We're throwin' up the position!" And for the first time the exultation in her voice raised it above a whisper. Then, putting her forefinger to her lip again, "Not a sound!" she breathed, menacingly, and moved on tiptoe to the door, her face set and shining, her shadow tumbling grotesquely on the walls and ceilings.

"A-a-a-h!" Billy fell back on the bed, screaming. Like a flash his mother turned; her hand was clapped fiercely over his mouth.

"You little devil!" she hissed. "What do you mean by disobeyin'?"

"The light! The light!" he gurgled.

She withdrew her hand. "What are you shakin' 'bout? There's light 'nough." She drew up the blind, and a faint moonlight blurred itself through the frosty glass. "You're growed up now, you big booby. An' your brothers are with you."

"I'll go with you," he gasped, clutching at her skirt.

"With that crutch o' yours, you pesky eyesore!" she whispered, angrily. "You'll stay with the little uns, bless their brave little hearts." And she clasped the dazed children to her breast. "The Lord hes punished him for his cruelty to you. . . . Finish your dressin', quick." She released the two little boys and glided cautiously from the room, holding the candle low, so that her great wavering shadow darkened the room even before the thicker horror of blackness fell when she was gone. The three children pressed together, their heart-beats alone audible in the awful stillness. They were too bewildered and terrified to exchange even a whisper. An impalpable oppression brooded over the icy room, and a dull torpor possessed their brain, so that they made no effort to understand. They only felt that something unreal was happening, something preternaturally solemn. After a dream-like

interval of darkness, the mysterious rustling was repeated without, a thin line of light crept again under the door, and their mother's face reappeared, gleaming lurid in the circle of the candle-rays. The two girls loomed in her wake, a big and a little, both wrapped up for a journey, but shivering and yawning and rubbing their eyes, still glued together by sleep. The younger boys, who had remained numb, guiltily gave the last hasty touches to their costume under the irate gaze of their mother. But Billy's face had grown convulsed.

His mother advanced towards him, dazzling his eyes with the candle and her face, and bending down so that her eyes lay almost on his.

"Don't you dare to have a fit now," she hissed, her features almost as agitated as his own, "or I'll cut your throat like I've cut his."

The intensity of her will mastered him, oversweeping even the added horror of her words, and combined with the return of the light to ward off the threatened paroxysm. He dragged on his top-coat. Only a few minutes had elapsed since he had sat up in bed, yet it seemed hours. The mother stealthily led the way through the hushed house, down the creaking stairs, blowing out the light in the hall. When she opened the outer door the cold air smote their faces like a whip. As she was cautiously closing the door a dark thing ran out through the aperture.

"There goes his soul!" she whispered, in grim exultation.

But it was only Sprat.

The creature, now old and infirm, quietly took his familiar place in the rear of the procession, which now set forth over the frozen moonlit snow under the solemn stars in the direction of Cobequid Village. The farm-hands, asleep in the attic built over the kitchen, in an "ell," or annex, to the main house, heard nothing. Ruth, sleeping the sleep of virginal health and innocence in her dainty chamber, was deep in kindly dreams. The woman led the way noiselessly but rapidly, so that the little children had to run to keep pace with her, and Billy dragged himself along by clinging to her skirt, dreading to be left behind in the great lonely night. The road led downhill

towards a little valley, in which stood the deacon's grist-mill, hidden by trees, but, as they drew near it, showing dark against the white hill that rose again beyond it. They descended towards it through a cutting in the hill lined with overhanging snow-drifts, curled like crystallized waves. Everything seemed dead; the mill-pond was frozen and snow-covered; frozen bundles of green hides stood in piles against the front of the mill; there were icicles round the edges of the sullen cascade that fell over the dam. The mill-stream was a sheet of ice, spotted ermine-wise with black dots, where air-holes showed the gloomy water below. The procession crossed the little wooden bridge, bordered by bare willows, whose branches glittered with frost, and then the snow-path rose again. Every sound was heard intensely in the keen air—the rumbling of the little water-fall, the gurgling of the stream under the ice, the frost fusillade of the zigzag pole fences snapping along the route, the crunch of crisp snow under their feet. They mounted the hill, and reached the broad, flat fields that stretched on white and bare to Cobequid. The last inch of Deacon Hailey's possessions was left behind. Then the leader of the procession slackened her pace, and lifted up her voice in raucous thanksgiving:

"'When Israel, of the Lord beloved,
Out from the land of bondage came,
Her fathers' God before her moved,
An awful guide in smoke and flame.'

"Now, then, sing up, children!" she cried.

Bewildered and still half asleep, they obeyed — in bleating, quavering tones that came through chattering teeth to an accompaniment of cloudy breath.

The woman and her children passed on into the night, singing. Amid the stretches of sky and space they seemed a group of black insects crawling across a great white plain.

Abner Preep, coming down before dawn, found a bunch of children on the great kitchen settee, asleep in their clothes. The mother sat on the floor before the open stove, smiling

happily and muttering to herself. They had quietly taken possession of the old familiar room and stirred up the slumbering fire.

For the first few seconds Abner wondered if he was dreaming, for the next if he were mad. But another look at the crouching woman convinced him that it was not he that was mad; while a phrase from her babbling lips sent something of the truth home to his beating heart. He roused Harriet and broke the news as gently as time permitted. The brave girl bade him drive at once to Deacon Hailey's while she kept guard over her mother. Abner thereupon mounted his horse bare-back, to save time, and galloped to the farm.

To his relief he found the deacon little injured. The neglect of his beard had been "Ole Hey's" salvation. It had sprouted thick and tangled about his throat, and the mad woman, armed with a blunt knife, had only inflicted a flesh-wound, leaving the trachea unsevered. The sleeping man, suddenly awakening to the strange spectacle of his wife in out-door attire brandishing a knife, had fainted from horror and loss of blood. But presently recovering consciousness, he had clamored for Ruth, and with her help bound up the wound, already half stanched by the clogging beard.

The matter was kept in the family, but the deacon swore he would have no more to do with the woman or her unmannerly brood beyond paying the minimum for her incarceration where she could do no more mischief; and so Abner took her forthwith by sleigh and train to the capital, and placed her in a private asylum.

In this manner Mrs. Strang went back to Halifax.

When Matt heard the awful tidings his air-castles crashed and fell as at the crack of doom. Abner Preep was the messenger of evil, for Matt's painting tour had brought him near Halifax, and Abner thought it best to look up his boyish enemy ere he went back home.

Beneath all the tumult of consternation in Matt's breast there throbbed an undertone of remorse—a vague feeling that this would never have happened had he been on the spot. His boyish wilfulness had received its death-blow.

"But it served him right," he cried, with irresistible bitterness, when he heard the deacon had not only washed his hands of the family, but was now vindictively pressing Abner for the arrears of the mortgage interest which had been allowed to lapse while Abner was building up his position. Abner had always understood that Mrs. Strang had exacted the freedom of her property. But there was nothing in black and white.

"There's no gettin' out of it," said Abner, gloomily. "But your poor father must hev made an everlastin' mess of it, fur how there comes to be so much to pay arter all these years fur a few acres of ground an' a wretched shanty, durned if I can make out."

"He cheated father, you may depend," said Matt, hotly.

"I wouldn't go as fur nor thet," said Abner. "It ain't right to call a man a thief without proof. Anyway, I've got to stump up. I shouldn't ha' minded it in an ornery way, though I *hev* got two babies, bless their souls. But it comes hard jest now, with five extra mouths to feed."

"Oh, but you are not going to feed them!"

"Who, then?"

"Me, of course."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Matt!" said Abner. "You've got to go to London an' larn paintin'. Harriet's told me all 'bout you, an' she's got some o' your picters, an' they're rael beautiful. There's one in our bedroom. Besides, they're all growed up now a'most, an' they'll soon be feedin' theirselves. An' then, you see, the house itself is your sister's, not mine."

"It's mighty good of you," said Matt, hoarsely, "but it isn't fair."

"No more it was o' me fightin' you thet thar time," said Abner, smiling. "This evens things up."

There was a great lump in Matt's throat so that he could not speak. He held out his hand mutely, and Abner took it, and they gripped each other so heartily that the tears started to the eyes of both.

"Then thet's settled," said Abner, with husky cheeriness.

"No, that's only to beg your pardon," said Matt, recovering

his voice. "I've been a skunk to you, that's a fact. But I'm not going to behave badly again. I'm just raking in the dollars now hand over fist, and learning painting all the time into the bargain. I don't want a bit to go to London, and I've put by two hundred and eighty dollars that aren't the least use to me, and that 'll just come in handy to pay the old scoundrel. And I can easily send you five dollars a week till I earn more. Billy alone 'll cost you near that, I guess, and it's my fault he can't earn anything hardly."

In the end the imperious Matt had his way, and, while the boy went on to see his mother, Abner returned home with the situation considerably lightened, the bearer of money for Deacon Hailey, and loving messages for all Matt's brothers and sisters, even Harriet being now restored to grace.

Matt found his mother in a small padded room in a house that stood on the hill overlooking the harbor. She was gazing yearningly seaward, and tears trickled down her doleful cheeks. Matt stood silently near the door, surveying her askance with aching heart. Abner had told him that her life with Deacon Hailey had grown a blank to her, and he wondered if she would recognize him; in the last two years he had shot up from a hobbledehoy into a tall, stalwart youth.

When she turned her head at last and espied him she leaped up with a wild cry of joy, and folded him in her arms.

"Davie!" she cried, rapturously. "My own Davie! At last! I didn't see your ship come in."

A nervous thrill ran down Matt's spine as he submitted to her embrace. The separate tragedies of his parents' lives seemed poignantly knit together in this supreme moment.

"They're so strict with me here, Davie," she said. "Take me away from my folks, anywhere, where we can be happy and free. I don't care what they say any more—I am so tired of all this humdrum life."

Matt pacified her as best he could, and, promising to arrange it all soon, left her, his heart nigh breaking. He walked about the bustling streets like one in a dream, resenting the sunshine, and wondering why all these people should be so happy. Again that ancient image of his father's dead face was tossed

up on the waves of memory, to keep company henceforth with the death-in-life of his mother's face. The breakdown of his ambition seemed a petty thing beside these vaster ironies of human destiny.

Book III.—CHAPTER I

IN LONDON

On a dull February day a respectably clad steerage passenger disembarked at Southampton with little luggage and great hopes. He was only twenty, but he looked several years older. There were deep traces of thought and suffering in the face, bronzed though it was; and despite the vigorous set of the mouth and the jaw, the dark eyes were soft and dreamy. He was clean-shaven except for a dark-brown mustache, which combined with the little tangle of locks on his forehead to suggest the artistic temperament, and to repel the insinuation of rough open-air labor radiating from his sturdy frame and bearing.

Matt Strang's foot had touched England at last. Two long, monotonous years of steadfast endurance, self-sacrifice, and sordid economies—two years of portrait and sign painting, interrupted by spells of wagon-striping at two and a half dollars a day, had again given him the mastery of three hundred dollars, despite his despatch of five dollars a week to Abner Preep, and of a final subsidy of one hundred dollars to bridge over the time till he should have a footing in England. Gradually the cloud of despondency had rolled off, the spring-time of life and aspiration would not be denied, and though the pity and terror of his mother's tragedy had tamed his high spirit and snapped the springs of buoyancy, the passion for painting returned with an intensity that dulled him to every appeal of the blood in his veins; and with it a haunting fear that he could never live to see London or his artist uncle, that he would die in the flower of his youth, all his possibilities latent. So impatient was he to give this fear the lie that he suffered a

vexatious loss through his hurry to realize the bills and the goods in which his art had too often found payment. When the steamer floundered into a field of ice off Newfoundland, his semi-superstitious feeling wellnigh amounted to a quiet conviction that he would be shipwrecked in sight of port, the three hundred dollars serving but to sink him deeper.

Without stopping in Southampton to tempt Providence, he went straight on to London, every vein in him pulsing with feverish anticipations of mysterious splendors. The engine panted in answering exultation, and the rattle of the carriages was a rhythmic song of triumph. At last he was approaching the city of his dreams—the mighty capital of culture and civilization, where Art was loved and taught and honored. For some days now his whole being had been set in this key.

He sat at the window, gazing eagerly at the sunless landscapes that raced past him. Gradually he became aware of the approach of the monstrous city. Fields were interrupted by houses; later, houses were interrupted by fields; then the rural touches grew fewer and fewer, and at last he sped under a leaden sky amid appalling, endless, everlasting perspectives of chimney-pots and sooty tiles, and dingy houses and dead walls and vomiting columns and gasworks and blank-faced factories reeking with oppressive odors—on and on and on, as amid the infinities of a mean Inferno, whirring past geometrical rows of murky backyards with dust-bins and clothes-lines, and fleeting glimpses of grimy women and shock-headed children and slouching men, thundering over bridges that spanned gray streets relieved by motley traffic and advertisement hoardings, and flashing past gaunt mansions of poverty—bald structures with peeling fronts and bleared windows. There was a sombre impressiveness in the manifold frowziness, the squalid monotony; it was the sublime of the sordid. Fresh as Matt was from the immensities of sea and sky, the shabbiness of the spectacle caught at his throat; he thought chokingly of the unnumbered, unnoticed existences dragging dismally along within those bleak, congested barracks.

What had all this to do with Art? The glow of his blood died away, to be rekindled only by the seething streets into

which he emerged from the clangorous maze of Waterloo Station; the throb of tumultuous life that beat as a drum and stirred the blood as a trumpet. Yet he had not come up to conquer London, but to sit at its feet. His bitter experience of life had destroyed every vestige of cocksureness, almost of confidence, leaving him shy and sometimes appalled at his own daring, as he realized the possibilities of self-delusion. He knew that fame and money were the guerdons of Art, but these were only indirectly in his mind. If they sometimes flashed to his heart in intoxicating instants of secret hope, he was too full of the consciousness of his disadvantages and imperfections to think much of anything beyond getting the necessary training. Far down the vista of thought and years lay this rosy rim of splendor, a faint haze dimly discerned, but the joy of learning and practising his art was the essence of his yearning. And yet there were moments, like this of feeling London under his foot for the first time, when a consciousness of power welled up in his soul—a sense of overflowing energy and immovable purpose that lifted him high above the crowd of shadows.

Escaping the touts and cabmen, he carried his valise across a great noiseful bridge to the nearest inexpensive-looking hotel, intending to secure a base of operations from which to reconnoitre London before looking up his uncle. But though he was at once booked for a room, the genteel air of the place, with its well-dressed customers and white-tied waiters, terrified him with the prevision of a portentous bill. He would have backed out at once had he dared, but, he thought, now that he was in for it, he would give it a week's trial. He took only his breakfasts there, however, though the unnatural hour at which he took them made him an object of suspicion. He seemed always on the point of catching an early train. His other meals were taken at those modest restaurants where twopence is not a tip, but the price of a dish, and the menu is cut up into slips and pasted across the shop-window.

His first visit on the day of his arrival was to the National Gallery, not only to fulfil a cherished dream, but to see his uncle's pictures, to talk of which might smooth the meeting. But he could nowhere come across the works of Matthew Strang,

and a catalogue he could not afford; and he soon forgot the unseen pictures in the emotions excited by the seen, which plunged him into alternate heats of delight and chills of despair.

Despair alone possessed him at first in his passage through the Florentine and Sienese rooms. The symbolic figures of Catholicism had scant appeal for a soul which in its emergence from Puritan swaddlings had not opened out to mediævalism, and the strange draughtsmanship blinded him to everything else. If Margaritone or even Botticelli was Art, then his ideas must be even cruder than he had feared. He was relieved to find, as he continued his progress, that it must be the Madonnas that were crude, for he was apparently following the evolution of Art. But the sense of his own superior technique was brief—despair came back by another route. Before the later masters he was reduced to a worshipper, thrilled to tears. And, somewhat to his own astonishment, it was not only the poetic and imaginative that compelled this religious ecstasy; his soul was astrain for high vision, yet it was seized at once by Moroni's "Portrait of a Tailor," and by the exquisite modelling—though he did not know the word for it—of the head in his "Portrait of an Ecclesiastic." To the young Nova Scotian, who had so chafed at having to paint uncouth farmers, it was an illumination to see how in the hands of a Teniers, or, above all, a Rembrandt, the commonplace could be transfigured by force of technique and sympathy. And yet he surrendered more willingly to the romantic, held by the later "Philip the Fourth" of Velasquez, as much for its truculent kingly theme as for the triumphantly subtle coloring, which got the effects of modelling almost without the aid of shadows. And the fever of inspiration and mastery, the sense of flowing paint which pervaded and animated the portrait of the Admiral, was the more entrancing because of the romantic figure of the Spanish sailor; while beside Rembrandt's "Jewish Merchant," with its haunting suggestion of suffering and the East, even the fine Vandyke, its neighbor, seemed to lose in poetry.

The brilliant and seizing qualities had his first vote; luminosity of color, richness of handling, grip of composition—all that leaped to the eye. Being alone, he had the courage of

his first impressions; and having always been alone, he had the broadness that is clipped by school. The beautiful sense of form and landscape in Titian's "Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen" captivated him, though for subject he preferred the "Bacchus and Ariadne." He was equally for Murillo's "St. John and the Lamb," and for Andrea del Sarto's portrait of himself; for Palma's Christ-like "Portrait of a Painter." He wondered wistfully whence Bassano's "Good Samaritan" took the glow of its color, or Greuze's "Head of a Girl" its pathetic grace, and he was as struck by the fine personal, if sometimes unsure, touch of Gainsborough as by the vigorous handling and extraordinary painting force of Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose children alone he found unreservedly delicious.

Amid many sound if superficial judgments were many crude admirations and condemnations, destined to undergo almost annual revision. At the present stage of his growth, for example, the charming Correggio was his ideal of an artist—to wit, a skilful painter, suffusing poetical themes with poetical feeling.

Subject counted for him: a sympathetic theme seemed to him of the essence of Art.

But the craftsman in him was not to be suppressed. When he was absorbed in Raphael's "Pope Julius II.," his practical self suggested that the reds needed varnishing to bring up the head from the background; and though the fine feeling of Joseph Ribera's "Dead Christ" awoke long-dormant chords of religious emotion, what moved him most was the modelling of the foot caressed by the Magdalen's hair. His emotion subsided in the study of the painter's mannerisms, his heavy blacks and shadows. His delight in the luminous quality of Bordone's "Portrait of a Lady" was modified by an uneasy conviction that the left hand was unnatural. Even in Moroni's portraits the hands seemed slightly too small. Though he was astonished at the triviality of subject in Gerard Dow's "Fish and Poultry Shop," he must fain admire the exquisite quality of the still-life passages and the loving patience of the infinite touches; in Van Mieris' treatment of the same subject he found a resentful pleasure in the discovery that, despite the

marvellous accuracy of the dish of fish and the vegetables, the woman's head was too little, her left arm too heavy and too big for the right, her flesh more like fish, and her very cat purring in contented ignorance of its wrong proportions.

In the landscape galleries he was puzzled by the old classic landscape; the occasional fineness of line, the masterly distribution of masses, did not counterbalance his sense of unreality before these brown trees and sombre backgrounds. Where were the sunlight and atmosphere of Nature as he had known her, the sky over all, subtly interfused with all the living hues, the fresh, open-air feeling which he had tried to put into his own humble sketches of Nova-Scotian forest, and by virtue of which he found more of the great mother in Peter de Hoogh's pictures of the courts of Dutch houses than in all the templed woodlands of the pre-Gainsborough period? But Constable revealed to him the soul of loveliness of rural England, setting in his heart a pensive yearning for those restful woods and waters; Crome touched his imagination with the sweep of his lonely heaths; and Turner dazzled him with irisations of splendid dream, and subdued him with the mystery and poetry of sea and sky.

And the total effect of this first look round was inspiration. Over all the whirling confusion of the appeal of so many schools and ages, over all his bewilderment before early Italian pictures that seemed to him badly drawn and modern English that seemed banal, over all his dispiriting diffidence before the masterpieces, was an exultant sense of brotherhood, as of a soul come home at last. There were pictures to which he returned again and again with a feeling of reverential kinship, a secret audacious voice whispering that he understood those who had painted them — that he too was of their blood and race, though come from very far, and lonely and unknown; that he too had thrilled with the beauty and mystery of things; that he too had seen visions and heard voices. Quitting the gallery with regret tempered by the prospect of many magic hours in the society of its treasures, he found out the whereabouts of the Limners' Club, and took his way towards Bond Street, every sense thrilling with vivid perceptions, receiving pleasant impressions from the shop-windows, exhilarated by the pretty women

that brushed by him with a perfume of fashion, and keenly enjoying the roar of the town.

On the threshold of the club he inquired for Mr. Matthew Strang. The door-keeper eyed him surlily, and said there was no such member. The world grew suddenly dark and bleak again. He stammered in piteous apology that Mr. Strang had given him that address; and the janitor, a whit softened by his evident distress, admitted that Mr. Strang was sometimes about the club, and volunteered to send the boy to see—an offer which Matt gratefully accepted with a sense of taking alms. But Mr. Strang was not on the premises, and Matt was further driven to inquire where he *could* be found. The door-keeper, tired of him, replied to the effect that he was not Mr. Strang's keeper, and that it was not unusual to look for gentlemen in their own homes; whereupon Matt turned miserably away, too disheartened to ask where his uncle's own home was situate, and feeling that there was nothing for it but to keep watch over the club door till the great painter should appear. He lingered about at a safe distance (for to be seen by the door-keeper were terrible), scanning with eager glances the faces of the few men who passed through the swinging glass doors, his imagination glorifying them, and seeing rather halos than silk hats on their heads. But at last the futility of his sentinelship dawned upon him; he could not be sure of recognizing his uncle; he could not accost the celestials and question them; he must come again and again till he found his uncle at the club. The thought of facing the door-keeper made him flinch, but he knew the road to Art was thorny and precipitous.

It was three o'clock, but he had forgotten to lunch. Now that his emotions had been chilled, he remembered he was hungry. He looked around in vain for a mean eating-house, then reluctantly slipped into a public-house and ordered a glass of ale and something brown and dumpy which he saw under a glass cover. The wench who served him smiled so amiably that he was emboldened to ask if by chance she knew where Matthew Strang lived. Her smile died away, and nothing succeeded it.

"Matthew Strang, the painter," said Matt, with a ghastly sus-

picion that the girl did not even know the name. London to him meant largely Matthew Strang; it was to Matthew Strang that he had taken his ticket and booked his passage, it was to get to Matthew Strang that he had starved and pinched himself, and it depressed him to discover the limitations of fame—to find that Matthew Strang was not hung in the air like Mohammed's coffin, 'twixt earth and heaven, for all to see.

"There's the Directory," said the girl, lugging it down when she perceived that the good-looking young man with the curious drawling accent was not quizzing her. "You'll find painters in the Trade Directory."

The barmaid's satire was unconscious. Understanding the bulky red volume but dimly, Matt hunted up "Strang" in the general section. He was surprised to see there was more than one person of that name. But fortunately there was only one Matthew Strang, and he lived in a side street off Cavendish Square. Warmly thanking the girl, Matt gulped down his ale and hurried out to inquire the way, munching the relics of the cake as he hastened towards the long-elusive goal. Very soon, scanning the numbers, his eye flashed and his heart leaped up. There it was—the magic name—actually 'twixt earth and heaven, painted above a shop-window. Surprised, he came to a stand-still.

The window was one which would have arrested him in any case, for it was illumined with paintings and engravings, and through the doorway Matt saw enchanting stacks of pictures mounting from floor to ceiling, and the side wall was a gallery of oils and water-colors, and an aroma of art and refinement and riches seemed over everything, from the gold of the frames of the oil-colors to the chaste creamy margins of the engravings. He entered the shop with beating heart. His eyes lit first on a sweet-faced matron in a cap standing at the far end of the shop, reverentially surveying a faded "Holy Family," and while he was wondering whether she was the artist's wife, a dapper young gentleman, installed behind a broad desk near the door, startled him by asking his business.

He coughed uneasily, overcome by sudden diffidence. The series of barriers between him and his uncle gave the great painter an appalling aloofness.

"I want to see Mr. Matthew Strang," he stammered.

The dapper young gentleman looked inquiringly towards the sweet-faced matron. "Can this gentleman see Mr. Strang, Madame?" he said. Matt noticed that he wore a pearl horseshoe in his cravat.

"Certainly, sir. Be seated," said the lady, with grave courtesy and a pleasant touch of foreign accent, such as Matt had heard in the French families of Acadia. She disappeared for a moment, and returned in the wake of a saturnine-looking elderly gentleman, with interrogative eyebrows, a pointed beard, and a velvet jacket, the first sight of whom gave Matt the heart-sickness of yet another disappointment. But though his keen eye soon snipped off the pointed beard and wiped off the sallowness of civilization, revealing the David Strang interblent with the Matthew, his heart-sickness remained. The gap between him and this fine gentleman and great artist seemed too great to be bridged over thus suddenly. He became acutely conscious of his homely clothes, of his coarse, unlettered speech, of the low, menial occupations he had followed; he saw himself furling the sail and carrying the hod and sawing the wood; he felt himself far below the dapper young shopman with the pearl horse-shoe, and his throat grew parched and his eyes misty.

"Good-afternoon, sir," said his uncle, rubbing his hands with chilling geniality. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

In that instant Matt perceived all the perversity of which he had been guilty, he remembered he had flown in the face of his uncle's kind advice, and had not even apprised him of his departure from America.

"I want to buy some colors," he faltered.

His uncle's eyebrows mounted. "We do not sell colors, young man," he said, frigidly.

"I thought—" Matt stammered.

Matthew Strang contemptuously turned on his heel and withdrew. His nephew lingered desperately in the shop, without the strength either to go or to stay.

The lady, who had half followed her husband, turned back hes-

itatingly, and with reassuring sweetness said: "You will get colors near at hand, in Oxford Street. We only sell pictures."

Under her penetrating sympathy Matt found courage to say: "I'm sorry Mr. Strang got streaked."

"Streaked?" echoed Madame, opening her eyes, as with a vision of broadcloth brushing against wet canvases.

"I mean angry," said Matt, confusion streaking his own face with red.

"Yes, I remember now," said madam, sweetly. "It's an American word."

"Yes; it was in America that I heard of Mr. Strang," he replied, slowly, striving to accentuate his words, as though he were reading them from a school-book.

"Indeed?" Madame flushed now.

"Yes, I heard of his fame as a painter."

"Ah." Her eyes sparkled. Roses leaped into her blond cheeks. "I always told him his work was admirable," she cried, in exultant excitement, "but he is so easily discouraged."

Matt thrilled with a sense of the man's greatness.

"So you see," he said, with a quaver of emotion in his voice, "I was just wild to see him."

"I am so glad," cried Madame, with a charming smile. "I will go and tell my husband. He really must see you. Matthew," she called out, tremulously, fluttering towards the passage.

The saturnine figure in the velvet coat descended again.

"You must talk to the young gentleman, dear. He has heard of your fame in America."

Matthew Strang's interrogative eyebrows reached their highest point, and Matt's face got more streaked than ever. He felt he was in a false position.

"I heard of you from my father," he said, hurriedly. "What is the price of this?" he asked in his confusion, half turning towards the shopman.

"This etching of Millet's 'Angelus'? Three guineas, sir." He added, gauging his man, "We have a photogravure of the same subject—a little smaller—for half a guinea."

"Your father!" repeated Mr. Strang, gruffly. "He was a brother artist, I presume."

Matt would have given much to say he was not an artist, but a brother. But he replied instead: "No, not exactly. He was a captain." He felt somehow as if the whole guilt of his father's calling rested upon himself, and it was mean of him to cross the Atlantic to impose some of it on the dignified figure before him.

"Oh, I love soldiers," murmured Madame Strang.

Matt felt things were now entangled beyond the possibility of even future extrication, so he desperately consented to purchase the photogravure, threw down a sovereign, and, snatching up the change and the picture-roll, hurried from the establishment.

"What a charming young man!" said Madame Strang.

But Matthew Strang tapped his forehead significantly.

"You always will run yourself down, dear," murmured Madame.

"Josephine," replied Matthew Strang, in low, solemn tones, "the fellow is either a fool or a rogue."

"He's left sixpence on the desk," broke in the voice of the shopman.

"Ha! a fool! It is enough for me to live in my son. He has advantages which I was denied."

"The dear boy," breathed Madame.

The extravagant purchaser of the "Angelus" divided the rest of his week between the National Gallery, where he concluded his uncle had not yet been canonized, and the streets of London, which he explored fearlessly. In a few days of industrious investigation he saw more than many a Londoner sees in a lifetime. He had experience of the features and cook-shops of Peckham, Rotherhithe, Clapton, Westminster, Covent Garden, the East India Docks, the Tower, wandering wherever the shapeless city stretched its lubber limbs, and seeing things and places that made him glad of the protection of the pistol he carried in his hip-pocket. The very formlessness of the city fascinated even while it dazed him. He ceased to wonder that artists found inspiration in this atmosphere, in which the fog itself seemed but the visible symbol of the innumerable myste-

rious existences swarming in its obscure vastness. The unexpected was everywhere, green closes in the heart of commerce, quiet quadrangles in the byways of Fleet Street, quaint old churches by the river-side, bawling market-places behind stately mansions, great parks set in deserts of arid poverty, bustling docks hidden away in back streets, and elegant villas at the end of drab, dismal, long-trailing East-end thoroughfares, redolent of slush and cabbage-leaves and public-houses and fried fish. Miles were of light account to one who had lived in a land of great spaces, yet Matt was wearied by the lengthy sweep of the great arteries and the multiplicity of their ramifications, by this vastness that was but reiterated narrowness in its lack of the free open horizons to which his eye was used.

But the Titanic city awoke strange responses in his soul; something in him vibrated to the impulse of the endless panorama. Often his fingers itched for the brush, as if to translate into color and line all this huge pageant of life; for the spell of youthful poesy was still on his eyes, and if he could not see London as he had seen his native fields and sky and ocean, all fresh and pure and beautiful, if in the crude day its sordid streets seemed labyrinths in an underworld, unlovely, intolerable, there were atmospheres and lights in which it still loomed upon his vision through the glamour of fantasy, and chiefly at night, when the mighty city brooded in sombre majesty, magnificently transfigured by the darkness, and the solemn river stretched in twinkling splendor between enchanted warehouses, or shadowed itself with the inverted architecture of historic piles, or lapped against the gray old Tower dreaming of ancient battle. But he could only take rough pencil or mental notes of the romance of it all, and it was almost always the fantastic that touched his imagination and found expression in the pictorial short-hand of his sketch-book — lurid splotches of sunset against tall, grimy chimneys; tawny barges gliding over black canal-waters shot with quivering trails of liquid gold from the morning sun; ragged Rembrandtesque figures asleep under glooming railway arches, over which trains flew with shining windows; street perspectives at twilight, with strange, livid skies; filmy evening rain blurring the lights of the town to a tender haze; late om-

nibuses tearing by glistering, moonlit pavements, and casting the shadows of the outside passengers on the sleeping houses; foggy forenoons, with the eye of day inflamed and swollen in the yellow heaven. With his purchase of the "Angelus," on the other hand, he was not greatly taken, despite its sentiment. He had seen too much of peasants; he had himself stooped over the furrows when his heart was elsewhere; his soul turned from the mean drudgeries and miseries of the human lot, yearning for the flash of poetry, the glow of romance, the light of dream.

In spite of his boarding out, his bill for the week's bed, breakfast, and attendance reached as far as £1 19*s.* 3*d.*—a terrifying total that drove him headlong into the frowsiest coffee-house to be found in the slums round Holborn. Here he spent a wretched, interminable night, provoked by insects and mysterious noises into dressing again and keeping his hand on his pistol as he sat shivering on a chair. The staircases resounded with the incessant tramp of feet mounting and descending, and there were bursts of rowdy laughter and blows and tipsy jeers, and once his locked door was shaken, and Matt thought he had fallen into a thieves' den, and trembled for his savings. In the morning he called for his account and left, not without having discovered the real character of the place into which he had strayed. After some trouble he chanced upon a clean furnished room in the same neighborhood for four shillings and sixpence a week, attendance included. It was a back room on the third floor, and it gave on a perspective of tiles and shabby plaster, and the evidences of jerry-building in the doors and windows discomforted the whilom joiner's apprentice; but he calculated that for less than twenty of his pounds he would have a foothold in London for a year. He wellnigh cried to think of the weeks he had lost in that week of hotel luxury. On sixpence a day he could sustain life. On ninepence he could live in clover. Why, even making lavish allowance for the technical expenses of which his uncle had warned him, he would easily be able to stay on for a whole year. In a year—a year of ceaseless painting—what might he not achieve?

Ah, what hopes harbored, what dreams hovered in that bleak little room! The vague, troubled rumor of the great city rolled

up in inspiring mystery; the light played with instructive fascination upon the sooty tiles; high over the congested chaos of house-tops he saw the evening mists rifted with sunset, and on starry nights he touched the infinite through his rickety casement.

CHAPTER II

GRAINGER'S

Only, where to learn? There was the rub. He had looked to his uncle to put him in the way of instantly acquiring art, and here had he wasted a week without acquiring even information. But in the British Museum he lighted upon young men and women drawing from the antique, and entering into conversation with the shabbiest of the men, who was working at the head of a Roman emperor in chalk, pecking at it with a pointed pellet of bread, he learned that the Roman emperor's head was intended, in alliance with the torso of a Greek river-god, to force the doors of the Royal Academy Schools, the privileges of which gratuitous establishment the aspirant duly recounted. But the examination would not take place for some time, and Matt, though he felt it hard to have to pay fees elsewhere in the meantime, was secretly pleased at being able to shelve temporarily the thought of partaking in this examination, for the Roman emperor's head was appallingly stippled, and the student said he had been at work on it for four months, and evidently meditated touching and retouching it till the very eve of the examination. Matt did not think he could ever muster sufficient interest in Roman emperors to live with the head of one for more than a week. His heart sank at the thought of what he might have to go through to please professors and examiners, but he would have willingly tried his hand at copying a bust had not the student informed him he must apply for permission and give a reference to a reputable householder. With the exception of his unclaimed uncle, Matt knew no one, reputable or disreputable, householder or vagrant. But he obtained from the shabby delineator of the Roman emperor the address

of a cheap, good art-school, though he found, to his dismay, that even at the cheapest he could only afford to take the night class, from seven to ten, three times a week. He saw he would have to study form apart from natural color, and apply during the days the preachings of the three nights. Impatient, and holding his paint-box tight against his palpitating heart, he set out that very night to join the class, but losing himself in a labyrinth of squares exactly alike, did not find the school till half-past seven. Passing through an open door marked "Grainger's Academy of Art" in ugly and faded lettering, he found himself in a long, gloomy passage that led away from the rest of the house; and, following the indication of a dirty finger painted on the wall, he stole cautiously along the deserted corridor, which grew momentarily drearier as it receded from the naked jet of gas in the doorway, till it reached its duskiest at the point where it was bordered by a pair of cloak-rooms. Matt peered eagerly into their shadowy depths, which seemed to contain coals and a bicycle and litter, as well as clothing, and to exhale a flavor of ancient stuffiness; but he could detect no movement among the congested overcoats. At last, at the end of the passage, he stumbled against a boy in buttons kneeling with his eye to the key-hole of a door. Apologetically he asked the boy if this was Grainger's, and the boy, jumping up quickly, told him to walk in, and retreated in haste.

Matt opened the door. A wave of insufferably hot air, reeking of tobacco, smote his face and his nostrils; a glare of light dazzled his eyes. He was vaguely aware of a great square room crowded with young men in uncouth straw hats sitting or standing at work in their shirt-sleeves before easels; but the whole scene was a blur compared with the central point that stood out in disconcerting clearness. Immediately facing him, on a platform at the other end of the room, a nude woman was standing. He started back shocked, and was meditating flight, when a student near him growled to him to shut the door. He obeyed, and had an instant of awful loneliness and embarrassment amid this crowd of gifted strangers, in the rear of which he stood, paint-box under arm, wondering why nobody challenged his entry, and where Grainger was. Turning to look for

him, he upset a rickety easel and a disengaged stool, both of which seemed to topple over at the slightest touch. But his awkwardness saved the situation; the owner of the easel was good-natured and, perceiving he was a new-comer, bade him seat himself on the stool and fix up an easel next to him, the number painted on the oilcloth of the floor being unappropriated. As Matt had no canvas, he even went outside to buy him one for two-and-ninepence from the boy in buttons. Matt handed him the money with a feeling of eternal gratitude.

While his amiable fellow was thus busied in his behalf, the new student's keen eye absorbed the scene in detail. A great square dusty room, rimmed as to the roof by skylights, and lighted to-night from above by a great circular gas-flare; round two of the walls, patched here and there by the crumbling away of the plaster, ran a rack on which innumerable canvases and drawing-boards were stacked, and underneath the rack a streak of wood permeated the plaster to hold the pins by which crude sketches were fastened up, evidently for criticism; here and there hung notices of the meetings of Grainger's Sketching Club, mixed up with photographs and advertisements of studios, and of a drawing competition instituted by the proprietors of a soap, and the mural ornamentation was completed by clever nude studies, rapid *tours de force* of the visiting artists, as Matt discovered later; everywhere about the floor were canvases, boards, and an unstable assortment of three-legged easels, donkeys, quaintly carved chairs, and stools, high and low, upon which last students of all figures and complexions, some of them smoking, sat perched, crowned with the uncouth straw hats to keep the glare out of their eyes, and reduced to the shirt-sleeves by the heat from so many lights and breaths; the pendent gas-jets being supplemented by the paraffine lamp that lighted a shadowy corner where a skull grinned on a shelf, and by the big fire that was needed to keep the model from shivering on the throne, where she stood statuesque against the white background of a dirty sheet, her head resting against her arm.

And from everything breathed an immemorial dust—from the fire in the centre of the right-hand wall an impalpable ash seemed to drift; dust covered the mantel-piece and coated

the bottles of linseed-oil and fixative and the boxes of charcoal that stood upon it, dust draped in gray the dilapidated squash-nosed lay-figure that leaned drunkenly against the right side of the throne. In the corners of the room the dust had an air of legal possession, as if the statute of limitations had secured it against the broom. There were dusty mysteries doubled up on shelves, a visible leopard's skin suggesting infinite romantic possibilities for the others, and within a dusty barrel in a corner near him Matt saw dusty bits of velvet and of strange, splendid stuffs which he divined were for costume models, and the floor seemed a land of lost drawing-pins and forgotten fragments of charcoal. And then his heart gave a great leap, for his eye, returning timidly to the throne where it had scarcely dared as yet to rest, encountered a man's head bending over a writing-desk in the compartment of the floor to the left of it. Surely it could be no other than Grainger himself, that thin, austere man with the big bald forehead and the air of Wellington, and Matt thrilled with proportionate reverence, and turned his eye away, as if dazzled, to repose it on the inchoate paintings of the students who were squinting scientifically at the model, and measuring the number of heads with sticks of charcoal or their brush-handles. Some had her large, some small; some turned her head this way, some that; some were painting her, some drawing her — each from his point of sight.

As soon as his own canvas arrived, altogether forgetting his startled modesty in the delightful interest of the work, he fell to touching in the head with rapid strokes of a flowing brush. The woman vanished in the woman's form: what a privilege to enjoy and reproduce those beautiful curves, those subtle flesh-tones, those half-tints of cream and rose, seen under gaslight!

"What are you about?" said his mentor, presently.

"Painting her portrait," he replied, pausing, with painful foreboding.

"But where's the charcoal outline?"

"The charcoal outline!"

"Yes. You can't paint her without sketching her first in charcoal."

"Can't I?" asked Matt, with a sudden remorseful recollection of his first sitter, the Acadian legislator whose portrait had paved his way to sign-painting. He hastened to efface his ignorance with a palette-knife, and to obliterate it with a rag moistened with turpentine; but he was frightened and nervous and denuded of confidence in himself, and when he attempted to outline the figure the charcoal boggled at the greasy surface of the canvas; and while he was wrestling with his medium he became conscious that the great Grainger was behind him, and a nervousness that he had not felt when he pointed his gun at the bear in his forest home paralyzed his hand. Grainger stood for some moments watching his fumbling strokes, then he said:

"You want to join the Life class?"

Matt, flushing furiously, stammered an affirmative.

"Don't you think you'd better begin with the Antique?" asked Grainger.

Matt murmured that he didn't care about the Antique anyhow, and Grainger shook his austere head.

"Ah! there's no getting on without slogging away; it's no good shirking the ground-work. The living figure is all subtle lines. You can't expect to be equal to them without years of practice at the Antique and Still-life."

Matt plucked up courage to guess that he would have another try at the figure, and Grainger, having pocketed a quarter's fees, moved off, leaving Matt amazed at his own temerity.

"Do you think he'll be annoyed if I stay on here?" he asked his mentor, as he resumed his work with the determination to prove himself not unworthy of the privilege.

"If you want to chuck your money away, it's your lookout," said his mentor, candidly. "You don't hurt him."

"Then he won't say anything?"

"It doesn't matter what he says. He's not up to much."

"No?" queried Matt, astonished. "Isn't he a great painter?"

The student laughed silently. "A great painter keep a school!" he said. "No; it's only the failures that do that!"

"Then how can one learn?" asked Matt, in dismay.

"Oh, well, we have a visitor once a week—he's rather a good

man. Tarmigan! He's not an R.A., but he can knock off a head in twenty minutes."

"But the R.A.'s—what are they for?" inquired Matt, only partially reassured.

"For show," said the young man, smartly. "You *are* a green un, to think that you're going to get Academicians for thirty bob a month. You've got to go to the Academy Schools if you want *them*. And then the chaps say they're not much use. Most of them are out of date, and you get a different man every month who contradicts all the others. A fellow I know says the best of the visitors is Marmor, but he's awfully noisy and facetious, and claps you on the back, and tells you a story, and forgets to criticise. And then there's Peters—he sighs and says 'Very tender,' and you think you've improved, till you hear him say 'Very tender' to the next man too. The chief advantage of going to a school is that you get a model which you couldn't afford to hire for yourself, and you learn from the other fellows. And then, of course, there's composition—Tarmigan's jolly good for that."

By this time Matt had sketched his outline, and he was about to resume the brush when the clock struck eight. The model stretched herself and retired behind the dirty sheet, which now operated as a screen, and there was a rising, a putting down of palettes (each with its brushes stuck idly in its thumb-hole), an outburst of exclamations, a striking of matches, a mechanical rolling of cigarettes, a sudden lowering of the lights, and a general air of breaking up.

"School over already?" he asked, in a disappointed tone.

"No, they're only turning the gas down for coolness while the model has a rest. You see, she can't stand two hours straight off the reel."

"No, I guess not," said Matt, and then repented of having said "guess," for he was trying to prune away his humble expressions and to remember the idioms of the educated people with whom his new life was bringing him into contact. "It must be awful hard," he added.

"Yes; especially in a school where a lot of chaps are working at once, and she can't rest a limb because somebody might

just be painting it. One woman told me she'd rather scrub floors so as to feel her limbs moving about. But posing pays better. This is a new model—first time she's been here. Pity women with such fine figures haven't got prettier faces. Have a cigarette?"

"No, thanks," said Matt.

"Don't smoke?"

"I did smoke once, but I gave it up." Matt did not like to confess it was because he could not afford the luxury.

"You can't be an artist without tobacco," said his mentor, laughingly. "Ah, here's the model. I'll just go and get her address."

He went up to the model, who had re-emerged and seated herself at ease upon the throne, where a group of students, with pipes or cigarettes in their mouths, was in conversation with her.

Matt followed his mentor, interested in this new specimen of humanity, and thinking that he would prefer to paint her as she was sitting then, nude in that dim, mysterious light, surrounded by smoke-wreathed figures in tropic headgear, her face alive, her feet crossed gracefully, playing a part in a real scene, yet withal unreal to the point of grotesqueness.

"Oh, I've sat a lot for *him*," she was saying when Matt came up. "I stand every morning for the portrait of Letty Gray, the skirt-dancer; it's for the Academy. She can't come much, and she's awfully unpunctual. Of course I'm only for the figure."

"Weren't you in the Grosvenor Gallery last summer?" asked a bald middle-aged man.

"Yes; I was Setter's 'Moonbeam,'" began the model, proudly.

"I thought I recognized you," said the middle-aged man, with an air of ancient friendship.

"And I was also on the line in the big room," she added—"Colin Campbell's 'Return of the Herring-Boats.' And I got into the Royal Institute as well—Saxon's 'Woman Wailing for Her Demon Lover.'"

"Ah, here you are, then!" said a red-haired young man, producing an illustrated catalogue.

"Yes," said she, turning over a few pages. "And there's my husband—Sardanapalus, 223. They often have him at the Academy Schools," she wound up, with conscious pride.

"Ah, perhaps we shall get him here one week," said the middle-aged man.

While his mentor was taking down her address, Matt looked round the room. The austere Grainger, with a cigarette in his mouth, was reading a yellowish paper embellished with comic cuts. Most of the students were moving about, looking at one another's easels, the work on which, with few exceptions, Matt was surprised to find mediocre; a few sat stolidly humped on their stools, feet on rail and pipe in mouth; one group was examining photographs which its central figure had taken, and which he loudly declared knocked the painting of the Fishtown School to fits. From all sides the buzz of voices came through the stifling, smoky, darkened atmosphere.

"Have you seen Piverton's new picture?"

"Rather! Another S," contemptuously replied a very young man, seated, smoking a very long pipe before a very indifferent canvas.

"What do you mean, Bubbles?" asked a by-stander.

"What, haven't you noticed," he answered, with ineffable disdain, swinging his arm in illustration, "that the lines of his compositions are all curly—they always make S?"

"I thought they always made £ *s. d.*," interjected a curly-headed wag. And all except the very young man laughed.

"Bubbles is gone on Whistler," observed a freckle-faced student, compassionately.

"I admire him," admitted the very young man, candidly, "but I don't say he's the end of art."

"No; that's reserved for Bubbles," laughed the freckle-faced student.

"What *is* the end of art, Bubbles?" said another man.

"T, of course," put in the curly-headed wag. "Five o'clock and fashionable."

"I say, Grainger says Miss Hennery used to work in his day class," said a handsome young Irishman, strolling up with a bag of cakes, from which the model had just helped herself in the pervasive spirit of *camaraderie*.

"Well, I don't see anything to boast of in that," pronounced Bubbles, puffing at his long hookah. "She's only a feeble female imitation of Tarmigan. Her color's muddy, and her brother comes into all her men's heads."

"I suppose she can't afford models," said the Irishman, charitably. "Have a banbury."

Bubbles accepted, and the by-standers helped to empty the bag. Matt moved back towards his easel, passing a little dark man with a mane, who was explaining to a derisive audience that the reason he went to music-halls was to study character, and brushing by a weedy giant, who was boasting that he hardly ever went to bed, so tied was he to his anatomy. During his progress a meagre, wrinkled old man, with pepper-and-salt hair and a stoop, approached him, and said, in a husky whisper:

"Excuse me introducin' myself, but I do admire your feet so!"

Matt flushed, startled.

"My name's Gregson—William Gregson—and I've made a speciality of feet. The 'uman form divine is beautiful everywhere, sir, but the foot—ah! there you have the combination of graces, all the beautiful curves in a small compass; the arch of the foot, the ankle, instep, the beautiful proportions of it all when you do get a really beautiful foot such as yours. I come here, sir, every night to study the beautiful—for in daily life the foot is 'idden, distorted by boots and shoes that ignore the subtleties and delicacies of nature—and the foot is the first thing I look at; but how rarely does a model, man or woman, ex'ibit a truly beautiful foot! Oh, how I wish I could paint your foot, or take a cast of it—a study from the nude, of course! But no—you will not allow me, I know. May I at least be allowed to measure it, to take the proportions, to add to my knowledge of the laws of the beautiful foot?"

Matt faltered that he didn't know he had anything extraordinary in the way of feet.

"My dear sir!" protested William Gregson, showing the whites of his eyes.

Just then the light was turned up, and William Gregson re-

treated abruptly to his easel. The model's court scattered, and she herself resumed her inglorious occupation of the throne, placing her feet within a chalked-out line, and her arm against a mark in the sheet.

Matt, returning to his canvas, worked enthusiastically to finish the figure by closing-time, and laid down his brush with some minutes to spare, thereby drawing upon himself the attention of his mentor, who exclaimed:

"By Jove! What made you rush along like that?"

"There was no time," said Matt.

"Time! Why, there's four more evenings. Every model sits a fortnight—six nights, you know."

"Well, she's done, anyhow," said Matt, in rueful amusement.

"Yes, she *is* done anyhow." And his mentor laughed. "Why, that 'll never do. You can't show work like that."

"Why not? It's like her."

"Yes, but there's no finish in it. It's only a sketch. You're supposed to make a careful study of it. Tarmigan insists on the exact character of the model. He always says even Velasquez's early things were tight and careful."

But Matt felt he could not take the thing any further—at any rate, not that night; the fury of inspiration was over. He sat abstractedly watching the quivering of the model's tired limbs and her shadows on the screen, a dusky silhouette with lighter penumbras, till the hour was up.

On Matt's homeward journey he was overtaken by old Gregson, who discovered that their routes coincided, and renewed his admiration of Matt's foot and his request to gauge its beauties, till at last, unwilling to disoblige a brother artist, but feeling rather ridiculous, the young man slipped off his boot in the shelter of a doorway, under the light of a street-lamp, and the wrinkled old man, producing a tape-measure, ecstatically recorded, on a crumpled envelope, the varied perfections of its form.

At the next lesson Matt set to work and painted away all the force of his study in the effort to reach the standard prevailing at Grainger's. But he worked dispirited and joyless, like a war-horse between the shafts of an omnibus, or a savage in a

stiff shirt and a frock-coat; suppressing himself with the same sense of drear duty as when he had sawn logs or drilled potatoes. During the "rest," while Matt was listening in amazement to some secret information concerning royal personages, who seemed to have confided all their intrigues to Bubbles, William Gregson drew him mysteriously into the anteroom.

"Do you know, I couldn't sleep the other night?" said the meagre, wrinkled old man with the pathetic stoop.

"Were you ill?" said Matt, sympathetically.

"No. Your foot kept me awake."

Matt cast a furtive look at it, as if to read marks of guilt thereon.

"Yes; you must know I'm a shoemaker by trade, and love art, but I can't devote myself to it like you young fellows. I work 'ard all day 'ammerin' and stitchin'; it's only in the evenings that I can spare an hour for paintin'."

Matt's eyes moistened sympathetically. "I'm so sorry," he murmured.

"I knew you would be. I knew you had a beautiful nature. It always goes with beautiful feet. Ah, you smile! I'm an enthusiast, I admit, and you will smile more when you 'ear I sat up half the last two nights to create an artistic boot with your beautiful lines. You had given me the inspiration. I had to create there and then. I was tired of my day's work, I was poor, and my time was valuable; but before all I am an artist. Sir, I have brought the boots with me"—here he produced a brown-paper parcel from under his arm—"and I shall be proud if you will accept them as a 'umble tribute from a lover of the beautiful."

"No, no; I couldn't think of taking them," said Matt, blushing furiously.

"Oh, but you will vex me, sir, if you do not. It pains me enough already to think of you wearin' the cumbrous, inartistic pair I see."

"I won't take them unless I pay you for them."

"No, no. What is a guinea between artists?" And he pressed the parcel into Matt's hand.

Matt shook his head. He was appalled at the price, but he

felt it wouldn't be fair to take the poor old man's work for nothing. A vague suspicion that he was being tricked flitted beneath his troubled mind, but his worldly experiences had not yet robbed him of his guilelessness, and there was such a fire of abnegation in the homely face that Matt felt ashamed of his doubt, and drew out the money with a feeling that he was, at any rate, helping a worthy artistic soul.

"Here is the price of them," he said.

The artist took the money and looked at it.

"A guinea would give me nearly another month's lessons," he said, wistfully.

"Put it in your pocket, then," insisted Matt, his last doubt dissolving in fellow-feeling.

But the cobbler shook his head. "No, no, sir, you mustn't rob me of my impulse. I cannot charge you full price. Take back the shilling. Concede something to my feelings."

"There—if that 'll satisfy you," said Matt, reaccepting it.

"You won't tell the chaps," besought the shoemaker, pathetically. "They wouldn't understand us. They would laugh at our innocent enthusiasm."

As Matt shared this distrust of the sympathy of the studio, he was not backward with assurances of secrecy, while he was laboriously bulking his overcoat-pocket with the parcel.

At the end of the four lessons, when Matt's painting seemed to him to be getting almost as smooth as a wax figure, and as dead, Tarmigan came—a stern, ill-dressed man, prematurely gray—at whose approach Matt's heart was in his mouth. The famous artist moved leisurely but inevitably towards him, shedding criticism by grunts and phrases and gestures; expressing the ineffable by an upward snap of the fingers, accompanied by a Russian-sounding sibilation; inquiring sarcastically whether one student was drawing the model or the lay-figure, and sneeringly recommending another to move his drawing "if the model moved." Every now and again he sat down at an easel to get the man's point of view, and, taking up his brush, suggested tone and color, or, if it was a draughtsman's easel, borrowed his charcoal, and showed him how to put the head on the shoulders or fit on an extremity. When at length Matt felt the great man's

breath on his neck a cold shiver ran down his spine, the brush clove to his paralyzed hand.

"Ah, a new man!" said the visitor. "Not bad."

All the blood in Matt's body seemed to be rushing to his face. His hand began to tremble.

The visitor did not pass on immediately. He said: "Where do you come from? There's a want of sharpness in the shadows."

"From America," breathed Matt.

"I mean from what school?"

"I haven't been to school since I was a boy."

"Not been to an art school?" queried the visitor, in surprise. "Nonsense! Impossible! The face is very well, but the rest is not taken far enough. A little too clever! Search! search! Even Velasquez's early things were— But you must have had a deal of practice."

"I have painted quite a little," admitted Matt, "but not rightly, though I did study artistic anatomy out of a book. I've painted hundreds of portraits and signs and ceilings."

The artist was examining the work more minutely. "Don't you call that practice?" he said, a little triumphant smile flitting across his wintry face. "Hundreds of portraits—why, that means hundreds of models! Why, however did you get all those commissions? It's more than I can boast of. Try and keep that lower in tone, and don't use that color at all," he added, his fingers tattooing kindly on Matt's shoulder. The class had pricked up its ears, for the artist spoke by habit in a loud tone, so that all might benefit by his criticism of the individual, and his remarks to the new-comer were quite out of the ordinary run.

"It was only in the country places in Nova Scotia," said Matt, apologetically, "and people didn't know anything about it. So long as I made a handsome likeness, it was all they cared for. And then, of course, they were never—never naked."

"No?" said the celebrity, with a little laugh.

"No; they always wore their best clothes," said Matt, smiling, too. "So this is the first time I've done one like this."

"You haven't done it yet," said Tarmigan, moving on "There's that foot yet to be studied. Search! Finish!"

"If you please, sir," said Matt, with an unconscious reversion to the idiom of McTavit's school-room, "I *have* finished the foot."

"Nonsense," said Tarmigan. "You've got another toe to paint in."

"I thought I had to copy the model exactly," said Matt, meekly.

"Well, sir?" said Tarmigan, puzzled.

"Well, I only see four toes on that foot."

The artist was startled; he cast a rapid glance at the model. "Good Lord! the man's right," he murmured, for the model was indeed minus a toe.

"I say, you men," he said, "where are your eyes? You've given the model an extra toe. How often have I told you to look before you paint?"

All eyes were bent on the foot; the model reddened. Those whose work had not yet been examined hastened to amputate the toe; the others took on an air of injury.

"You might have told a chap," whispered his mentor.

"I thought you knew," said Matt. "I saw it as soon as I began to paint, but I didn't take any notice of it in my first rough sketch. It was only when you told me I must copy the model exactly that I put it in, or, rather, left it out."

For some time longer the fusillade of Tarmigan's criticisms rang out intermittently: "Not bad." "Humph! I wouldn't make too much of those little things! Keep it broader!" "That's very well!" "Psch!" "That's better!" "Don't get your shadows too hot!" "That's a good bit!" "That leg's too long from the knee down!" "Don't lick it *too* much!" "Not bad!" "No, no; that won't do at all!" "You'll never get her feet into that canvas!" "Look at the model with your eyes nearly closed and compare the tones!" Then Tarmigan set a composition to be done at home in illustration of "Charity," and stalked through the door amid a chorus of "Good-nights" in incongruous keys, and then there was a silence so tense that the creak of his departing boots could be heard dying away in the long passage; but it was not till the "rest" arrived, and the model, wrapping a cloak round

her, had left the room, and Grainger had silently disappeared after his wont, that the storm burst.

Bubbles led off.

"Who ever saw a picture of a woman with four toes?" he cried, disgustedly.

"Yes. How could he expect us to examine her blooming toes?" said the freckle-faced student.

"Oh, I saw she had four toes right enough," said Bubbles. "But a painter hasn't got to paint accidents—he's got to paint pictures."

"It 'll be an accident if you paint pictures," put in the curly-headed wag.

"*I* saw the missing toe," asserted the handsome young Irishman, "when I set her for the class. But I wasn't going to spoil the study. One can easily imagine a toe. He's got no sense of poetry."

"I saw a scratch on her wrist," volunteered the middle-aged man. "I wonder he didn't want us to paint that."

"I suppose he'll put a background to it, and send it to the Academy," cackled the red-headed young man.

"They've got blue noses in Nova Scotia, I believe. I wonder if he put *them* into his portraits?" the weedy giant remarked in a loud whisper to the little man with the mane.

Though the last two remarks were so impersonal, Matt knew well enough they were aimed at him, and he seemed to feel an undercurrent of resentment against himself beneath the animadversions on Tarmigan, whom he knew the studio revered. He sat uneasily on his stool, poring mechanically over his unhappy study from the nude, and morbidly misreading animosity into this good-humored badinage. Before his mother's living death he might have replied violently with word or even fist, but life had broken him in. Seeing the new man spiritless, another student took up the parable:

"He's going to leave it to the nation."

"Then he'll have to leave it on the door-step when nobody's looking," replied the weedy giant.

Then the stream of wit ran dry, and comparative silence fell upon the room.

Abruptly the voice of the curly-headed wag shot across the silence: "Four-toes, R.A."

The cry was taken up in a great shout of laughter, even the uninterested joining in from sheer joy in a catchword. It seemed to Matt he had not a friend in the room. But he mistook. The grizzled old shoemaker sidled up to him.

"You've licked me, sir," he said, in emotional accents. "You've shamed me; me, whose speciality is feet. I never noticed there was a toe missin'. No, sir; not even me. Your hand, sir. I bear you no malice."

Gratefully Matt gripped the cobbler's extended hand, and he took occasion to apologize for not enduing the artistic boots, explaining that he was reserving them for high days and holidays. He let the bantering cry die away unanswered, but at heart he was sick with the thought he was to repeat the experience of the St. John paint-shop, and he had a fierce impulse to shake the dust of the studio off his feet, even as he had thrown up his position in New Brunswick, and in his resentful bitterness he allowed his sense of the inferiority of the jeerers' work to well up into clear consciousness. And thus he brought himself round to the remembrance of the great Tarmigan's words, and to a softening sense of gratitude for the strange way in which he had been acquiring art in his own land, even while he was yearning and planning to get it across the seas. And so, though the nickname stuck to him — for, indeed, Grainger's scarcely knew his real name—he remained at the studio, learning to take its humors more genially, and even to partake in them, and drawn to its *habitués* by the discovery that they, too, were fighting their way to art from the shop, the school, or the office, but never losing altogether the shyness and sensitiveness of a lonely alien and high-spirited soul.

From Tarmigan, whose executive faculty and technical knowledge were remarkable, and who, despite surface revolts behind his back, was worshipped by the whole school, Matt got many "pointers," as he called them in his transatlantic idiom—traditions of the craft which he might never have hit out for himself; though, on the other hand, in the little studies he made at home and sometimes showed to Tarmigan, he produced effects instinc-

tively, the technique of which he was puzzled to explain to the master-craftsman, who for the rest did not approve of the strange warm luminosities Matt professed to see on London tiles, or the misty coruscations that glorified his chimney-pots. Grainger himself never offered criticisms to his pupils except casually, and mainly by way of conversation, when he was bored with his own thoughts.

To the science of art which Tarmigan taught, and which was based upon inductions from great pictures, Matt in his turn did not always take kindly; the reduction of æsthetics to rule chafed him; he was distressed by Tarmigan's symmetrical formulæ against symmetry, and though some of the canons of composition seemed to him self-evident when once pointed out, and others not unreasonable, he could not always relish the mechanical application of the general law to his particular case; but he suppressed his untutored instincts, much as in her day his mother had wrestled with Satan, and in faith, hope, and self-distrust submitted himself duteously to law and Tarmigan. He worked fluently for the most part, but every now and then came a sudden impotency not always due to lack of sympathy with the model; an inability to get the exact effect he wanted, which tortured him even more than Tarmigan's strait-waistcoat of dogma.

Very soon Grainger's grew half boastful, half jealous of its American prodigy, whom all later arrivals, catching up the nickname without the history of its origin, imagined to be likewise abnormal in the number of his toes. Some recalled Byron's club-foot, and wondered if Matt Strang's pedal defect had any connection with the genius of "Four-toes, R.A."

CHAPTER III

THE ELDER BRANCH

In the heated discussions at Grainger's of the demerits of the painters of the day, no one ever mentioned the name of Strang except once; and then the Christian name was not Matthew. Matt did not like to bring up the name himself, as

it was his own, but he soon understood that artists do not deal in other people's pictures, and, recalling Madame Strang's remark about her husband, he gradually came to the conviction that his namesake was the dethroned god of an earlier day, discouraged into sterility and commerce by the indifference of the younger generation. And as the deity loomed less terrible, and as Matt felt himself more at home in the art atmosphere of England, so the idea of making himself known to his uncle began to be shorn of its terrors, and even to be tinged with the generous thought of inspiring the neglected artist to fresh work—an inversion of attitude, the humor of which did not occur to him.

But when one afternoon he did betake himself again to the elegant emporium off Cavendish Square, and found himself face to face with the dapper young gentleman and his horseshoe cravat-pearl, the old awe of the refinement radiating from every quarter of the compass overwhelmed him, and his tongue refused to ask for Mr. Strang, compromising by a happy thought in the demand for Madame. Madame appeared forthwith, flashing upon him a sense of matronly sweetness and silk, and snatching him from the embarrassment of openings by exclaiming in her charming accent:

"Ah, you've come for your change."

"What change?" asked Matt.

"You left sixpence on the desk. I noted it down."

"It is very kind of you," said Matt. "I had no idea you would remember me all this time."

"I never forget clever people," said Madame, with a bewitching smile.

"How do you know I'm clever?" Matt smiled back.

Madame waved away the question with her plump white hand in silent smiling reaffirmation. "I've always lived with clever people," she said, simply. "Talent is the only thing I admire in this world."

Matt said lamely that he was glad to hear it. The phrase was a poor expression of his pleasure in at last meeting a soul with his own ideals.

"Where was it you saw my husband's pictures?" asked Madame, eagerly.

Matt flushed. "I didn't see any," he confessed. "My father told me about them."

"Where did your father see them?"

"At home, when they were boys together."

"What! They were school-fellows?"

"Brothers!" said Matt, and felt the instant relief of criminal confession.

Madame uttered a little cry of delighted astonishment, and took Matt's hands in hers.

"My dear sir, my dear sir!" she cried, shaking them, "I knew you were clever. Come inside—come inside. Why didn't you say who you were last time? You are the boy who wrote to Matthew from Nova Scotia years ago! What a pity he is out! He will be so charmed."

And, still holding his hands, she led him up a little flight of stairs into a daintily furnished sitting-room, resplendent with pictures, and sat him down in a soft arm-chair, and hung admiringly over him, and plied him with inquiries as to his past and his projects and things Nova Scotian (without always waiting for an answer, or ever getting more than a brief generality), and rang for claret and cake, which were brought in by a pretty girl in a piquant white cap, but which Matt refused for fear of seeming to be in want of refreshment.

"I have a son who is also an artist—oh, so clever, the dear boy!" she told him. "You must know him — you will love each other. He is at work now in his studio; but he must not be interrupted till the light fails."

Matt's eyes kindled. "I shall like to know him," he cried, fervently.

"Yes, dear Herbert! Oh, you've no idea how sweet and good and clever he is! He's twenty-three, yet as obedient as a child. We're so proud of him—his father and I. He quite consoles us for the failure of the English to appreciate Matthew's work."

"Oh, where can I see uncle's work?" asked Matt, eagerly.

Madame shook her head sadly. "Oh, he parted with all his pictures ever so many years ago," she said.

"But aren't they exhibited anywhere?"

"We don't know. They must be some day, if they are not destroyed, for they are so clever. But the fact is—though, of course, I wouldn't tell it to a stranger—we had to—to—pawn them, and they were never redeemed, and poor Matthew never would paint again, he was so embittered. Oh, it was such a slow, sad struggle, those early days of our married life! For years no one would buy poor Matthew's work, and when the money he had brought from Nova Scotia gave out we should have starved if I had not started a little dress-maker's shop. They still call me Madame," she interpolated, with a melancholy smile.

"But you *are* French, aren't you?" said Matt, thrilling with the pathos of those far-away struggles.

"Yes, my parents were French, but I have spoken English almost from girlhood."

"There is French blood in our family, too," murmured Matt, with a sad recollection of his mother. He wondered what she was doing at the moment.

"Indeed! Perhaps that was what drew me to Matthew—that and his artistic genius. Poor Matthew!"

"But you are well off now?" said Matt, dubiously. He did not trouble to correct her mistake, to explain that the French blood was on the spindle side.

"Oh, we are rich. We have all we want. When my dress-maker's business grew prosperous—in fact, quite a fashionable resort—Matthew, who could not bear to be out of touch with art, though he had sworn never to paint again, saw his way to dealing in pictures. Of course, he makes far more than any of his artist friends who succeeded, but that does not console me for the pictures the world has lost."

"But why doesn't he paint now that he has money?" inquired Matt.

"He says he's too old," said Madame, sighing. "And besides, he thinks he'd only be eclipsed by Herbert. Of course, Herbert *is* exceptionally gifted; he took the medal at the Royal Academy Schools, you know, for the best copy of an Old Master, and he has had advantages which were denied to his poor father. But still it often makes me cry to think of how he

sinks himself in the dear boy, not caring a jot about his own reputation. Oh, there are few such fathers, I can tell you. I don't know what I have done to deserve such a husband, I who have no cleverness or talent of any kind."

And here, as at his cue, Matthew Strang entered, in a soft hat and a black cloak vastly more impressive than the staid shabbiness of Tarmigan, than whom his Vandyke beard alone gave him the greater artistic distinction. He leaned slightly upon a gnarled walking-stick.

Madame sprang up to meet him in the doorway. "Oh, Matthew!" she cried, ecstatically, "the young man who wanted to see you is your own nephew. And he is come to study art. And won't it be delightful for Herbert to have a companion? I made him wait for you — I knew you wouldn't be long." And radiant beneath her cap, Madame stepped aside, as if to leave the stage free for the rapturous embrace between the uncle and his long-lost nephew. But Matthew Strang stood rigid with astonishment, only his eyes moving in startled examination of the young man, who had risen respectfully.

For an interval of seconds that seemed numerable in minutes he looked at Matt without speaking, leaning on his stick, his saturnine face growing momently darker.

"Davie's son, I suppose," he said, slowly, at last.

"Yes, sir," said Matt.

"H'm! I might have seen it. So you have come to England, after all?"

"Yes, sir. But not till I had the money for my studies."

Matthew Strang's face lightened a little. "Sit down! Sit down! No need to stand," he said, with uneasy graciousness, placing his disengaged hand on Matt's shoulder. "And how are all your folks?"

"Oh, they're pretty spry, thank you," said Matt, resuming his chair.

"Let me see—your mother married again, didn't she?"

Matt nodded.

"She's still alive, I suppose?"

"Ye-es," faltered Matt.

"And how's the Province?"

"It's about the same," said Matt, vaguely.

"Ha!" said Mr. Strang, with an all-comprehending air.

He allowed Madame to divest him lovingly of his cloak. Then he said: "You're settled in London, then?"

"I shall stay here some time."

"Humph! You're not like your father. He could never stay in one place. Well, well, I'm sure I wish you success, but you know it's not an easy line you've gone into."

"So you wrote to me, sir."

"Ha! Well, I wrote the truth."

"I was much obliged to you, sir, for your advice," said Matt, sincerely.

But the elder man, suspecting sarcasm, replied half defiantly: "There's not one man in a thousand that makes his bread-and-butter by it. Why, I've just bought a picture from an A.R.A. for fifty pounds; it's worth treble. You would have done better at your farm—or was it a saw-mill?"

"It isn't the money I was thinking of, sir; it's the joy of painting."

"Hum! I talked like that once." Matthew Strang sat down rather peevishly and crossed his legs.

"And you talk like that now, too," said Madame, with gentle reproach. "Not for yourself," she corrected, hastily, as his eyebrows took their interrogative altitude. "But you know you don't care if Herbert doesn't make money for years, so long as he makes a reputation eventually."

"Herbert is in a different position. He doesn't need to earn anything."

"Nor does your nephew," said Madame. "He has ample resources, he tells me."

Matt blushed at Madame's unconscious magnification of his curt statement on the point, but he did not think it worth while contradicting her. Matthew uncrossed his legs restlessly. "I suppose your mother married a well-to-do man?"

"Yes, pretty well-to-do," Matt stammered.

"Why didn't you say who you were at first?"

"I didn't like to. I—I remembered you had advised me not to come to England."

"Well, the mischief was done; you might just as well have spoken. I might have given you some advice. . . . You could have had the engraving at trade price. . . . If you are looking for etchings, or any little things for your rooms, I couldn't dream of treating you like a stranger."

"Thank you," said Matt, with feeble fervency.

"Don't mention it," said his uncle, holding up his right palm deprecatingly. "By-the-way, what made you address your letter to the National Gallery?"

Matt colored. "I thought all the London painters lived there," he said, with an uneasy smile.

Madame laughed heartily. "Why, Matthew only got it through an official inquiring among the people copying pictures there. One of them happened to be a customer of ours, and suggested trying us."

"Yes, it was all boyish foolishness," said Matt.

"And where are you living, now that you have come?" said his uncle.

"Not far from here—in Holborn." He added, hastily, for fear his uncle might be meditating a visit: "I can bring you some of my work if you like."

"Oh yes, do! Won't that be charming!" interjected Madame, clapping her hands.

Matthew checked her with a stern glance. "I don't think I should be able to do anything with an unknown man," he said, shaking his head.

"No, I don't mean that," said Matt, getting hot. "I thought you might like to see that I wasn't quite a duffer. I don't expect to sell my work yet, but they think I'm rather promising at the school."

"What school? Who thinks?"

"Tarmigan."

"Tarmigan!" echoed Matthew Strang. "Why, I could have picked up one of his water-colors for a fiver last week. Tarmigan has been going down steadily for the last four years. He took the gold medal at the Academy, and at first promised well. Ten years ago I even meditated a corner in him, but luckily I had the sense to sell out in time, before it was quite

certain he would never even be an Associate. No wonder he's reduced to visiting."

"Oh, but he does that for nothing, they say," protested Matt, hotly. "He's a jolly fine chap!"

"Ha! No wonder he doesn't get on. Who ever heard of a really good man wasting his time in that way?"

"Then don't you think I'm doing any good studying under him?" asked Matt, in affright.

"Oh, he's all right for teaching; I haven't a word against him. He's one of the few men in England who are supposed to know their trade. But he's too stilted and classical; there's no sentiment in him; he don't touch the heart of the buying public. It's all science and draughtsmanship, and he won't do anything to meet the market half way."

"It's spunky of him to stick to his convictions, anyhow," said Matt, in low tones, provoked by his uncle's disparagement into a recrudescent enthusiasm for Tarmigan, who had recently been weighing upon him like a nightmare.

"Bah! and how does he know his convictions are right? The public's the best judge of art."

"Oh!" said Matt, deprecatingly. "Should you really think that's so?"

"Of course I think so. Would the public have *me?* No. And the public was right." He looked at Matt half fiercely, as if defying him to deny it. Madame was smiling and shaking her head. "The public's always right," he went on, emphatically. "It's the critics that throw the market into perpetual confusion. Such a babel of voices, all laying down what is right and what is wrong, what is art and what is not art, that it's enough to drive a dealer crazy. For my part, I steer by the Academy; that's my polestar, and I'm rarely out, for that's what the public take their reckoning by. And it's an R.A. that my boy is going to be, please God, for theories may come and theories may go, but the Academy goes on forever."

"Dear Herbert!" murmured Madame.

"I suppose he's awfully advanced," said Matt, wistfully.

"Years ago he took the medal for the best copy of an Old Master at the Royal Academy Schools, where he is now just

finishing his course," explained his uncle. "And you know you can't even begin the course without being clever."

"No, I know," said Matt, with a sinking of heart, for he had by this time studied the prospectus of the national art-schools and been dismayed, not so much by the anatomical information and technical expertness demanded at the entrance competition as by the slow-dragging septennial course, the drudgery of still-life and perspective and the antique, and all the tedious grind of convention. "I thought of trying to get in myself, but I'm afraid I shall have to give up the idea."

"Oh, Herbert only drops in there now and then," said Matthew, loftily. "He works mostly at home with his own models."

Matt had a pang of envy.

"And then he has always had the benefit of your experience," he said.

"Oh, I can't pretend to have done more than encourage him."

"Now, Matthew," said Madame, shaking her finger fondly, "you know it was at your knee that he made his first studies."

Matthew smiled faintly, not displeased. "I'm like Tarmigan: I can teach better than I can paint," he said, and poured himself out a glass of wine, fascinating Matt's eye by the play of light in the diamond on his forefinger. "If I listened to my wife, I should give up business and set up an easel again, as in my young and foolish days. Thank God," he said, pausing to gulp down the claret, "I had sense to stop in time! What could be expected of a young man who'd lived on a farm in a God-forsaken country? Ah, your father was right! He never would allow any merit to my ships or cows."

Red sands flitted before Matt's vision, with lambent pools, and overhead a diaphanous rosy vapor, beyond which brooded the vast cloudless circle of the sky. Ah, God! why was the sky so blue and depthless in those days? As from dim, far-away caverns, the acrid voice of the picture-dealer reached his ears in complacent exposition: "It's all training, and if you don't get trained young, you might as well attempt to fly."

Becoming conscious of a silence, Matt answered, "That's so."

"It's the same with music," went on his uncle, tapping impressively on his wineglass with his glittering forefinger. "You can't expect a grown-up man to sit down and practise scales like a little girl in a pinafore; and even if he would, his fingers have lost their suppleness, his joints are set. I saw this clearly, and was determined my boy shouldn't suffer as I'd done. Why, Herbert had a brush put into his hand before he could write!"

Matt's heart sank lower.

"I should like to see his work," he said, anxiously.

"Ha!" said Matthew, a complacent smile hovering about his lips.

"Oh yes, let him see Herbert's work," pleaded Madame.

"I don't think we ought to disturb him," said Matthew, yieldingly. "Won't you take another glass of wine?"

"No, thank you, sir," said Matt, who was quite faint, for his dinner had been of the slightest; and feeling the request a signal to take his leave, he rose.

"Oh yes, do let him see them," said Madame, hurriedly. "It's only for once."

"Oh, well, as you're a sort of relation," said the father, imposingly. "But I make it a point not to interrupt him. These hours are precious; there's not too much light at the best of times." And, as if following Matt's impulse, he rose and turned doorward.

"There's no need for you to trouble, Josephine," he said, waving her back.

As they mounted the soft-carpeted staircase, on which undraped marble statues looked down from their niches, he explained, gravely, "There's a male model up there, you see."

Matt nodded, awed to silence by the splendor of the staircase, up which he toiled side by side with the Vandyke beard and the velvet coat.

"Herbert, of course, uses the side door," vouchsafed his companion, graciously, to relieve the monotony of the long ascent. "I couldn't have his models coming through the shop."

Matt murmured something negative, but his reply was lost in a dull thud from above. The elder man cleared the remaining stairs in alarm, and threw open the door.

"Give us a hand up, you beggar," a piping girlish voice was saying.

On the rich carpet of the vast, elegant studio, whose glories dazzled Matt's vision, a slim young man was sprawling on his back. Over him stood a stalwart figure, clad only in boxing-gloves.

The saturnine picture-dealer rushed forward and helped his boy up.

"It's all right, dad," said Herbert, in unembarrassed amusement as he was scrambling to his feet. "I just wanted to give the model's arms a little movement during the rest. The position's so difficult for him, I haven't been able to get the thing right all day. Look! there's nothing at all on the canvas; I've had to paint it out."

The model had somewhat shamefacedly taken off his gloves and struck an attitude upon the throne.

"Ha!" said Matthew Strang, in vague accents. "You ought to be getting on faster with those gold-medal studies, now that you have put aside your picture for this year's Academy. You will need all your time, you know. I've brought you a visitor."

Herbert turned his face towards the door—the handsome, glowing face of a boy, beardless and clean-shaven, with candid blue eyes and tumbled flaxen hair, and the flash of white teeth accustomed to display themselves in laughter. There was his father's interrogative mark about the arched eyebrows as he caught sight of Matt, hanging back timidly on the threshold.

The young Nova-Scotian's heart was leaden, his soul wrapped in a gloom which had been gathering blackness ever since he had set foot in his uncle's shop, and which the sight of the commodious studio, with its rich properties and luxurious appliances, its crimson lounges and silk drapings and fleecy rugs and gleaming marbles and bronzes, had darkened into despair. The penurious past surged back to him through a suffusion of unshed tears — tears that were salt with the sense of injustice and of sorrows unforgettable, all the creeping, irremediable years contributing their quintessence to the bitterness of this supreme moment: the chances he had missed, the lessons he had not received, the obstacles that had rather sprung up to beat him back,

whose infant fingers no loving hand had ever guided, whose boyish yearnings no word of encouragement had ever sweetened, whose youth had been all distasteful labors and mean tragedies and burdens too great to bear, and whose very triumph would find none to sympathize with it, if it came, as it never could come to one so untrained, so alien from the world of art and elegant studios and all the soft things of life; driven to the scum of the streets for models at a few pence an hour, and reduced to studying attitudes from his own contortions before a bleared strip of mirror in a dingy back room; unregarded, uncared-for, unknown, an atom in that vast magic-gleaming London which had so cruelly disillusioned him, and in which even the one heart in which his own blood ran was cold and far away; his poor pre-eminence at Grainger's, his primacy among a set of duffers, no augury of success in that fierce struggle in which Tarmigan himself had gone to the wall. Was it worth while to vex himself endlessly, swirled to and fro like a bubble on an ocean? Were it not sweeter to break, and to be resolved into the vastness and the silence?

His right hand wandered towards his hip-pocket, where his pistol lay. How good to be done with life! Then he became aware, through a semi-transparent mist, that the gracious blond boy was holding out his hand with a frank smile, and instinct drew out his own right hand in amicable response, and so the temptation was over. The poor children dependent upon him came up to memory, and he wondered at his spasm of selfish despair.

His uncle must have said words to which he had been deaf, for Herbert seemed to know who he was and why he had come.

"Welcome, fair coz," he said, gripping Matt's hand heartily. "I feel as if I were in Shakespeare. A moment ago I scarcely remembered I had a relation in the world. Confound it! why weren't you a girl cousin while you were about it?"

"Herbert, don't be rude," said his father.

Herbert elevated his blond eyebrows. "I wish you would cultivate a sense of humor, dad," he observed, wearily. Matt, who was responding to his grip, fascinated instantly by the boy-

ish, sunny charm, loosed his clasp in sheer astonishment at the transition.

Matthew Strang disregarded his son's observation, but gruffly told the model, whose attitudinizing immobility was irritating, that he need not pose for a moment or two, whereupon Herbert bade him begone altogether. "I've been off color all day," he observed, explanatorily, as he counted out the model's silver, "but the excitement of discovering I am not alone in the world is the finishing touch."

Matthew threw a rather reproachful look at Matt, whose eyes drooped guiltily. He raised them immediately, however, in accordance with his uncle's instructions, to admire a study of a draped figure which was hung on a wall. The coloring struck him agreeably, though he found a certain feebleness in the drawing which was equally agreeable to his jealous mood. This not displeasing impression was borne out by the other pictures and sketches for which his uncle besought his admiration: always this facile poetic coloring and this indifferent draughtsmanship, this suggestion of difficulties shirked rather than of difficulties overcome; at last seen to be due to the conventional composition, most of the works, whether in chalk or water-color or oil, being pretty landscapes or single-figure studies in simple attitudes, or, when complicated by other figures, embracing episodes which seemed to have been transferred direct from other pictures, some of which, indeed, Matt had seen either in the originals or in engravings. To his astonishment, Herbert, who had been yawning widely, drew his attention to one such little bit.

"Don't you recognize that?" he said. "Dad did at once. It's a quotation from Millais."

Matt looked puzzled at the phrase.

"'Cribbing,' the unwise it call," expounded Herbert, "and so did dad, till I explained to him it was only quoting. When a great writer hits off a phrase it passes into the language, and when a great painter hits off a new effect of technique, or gets a happy grouping, I contend it belongs to the craft, as much as the primitive tricks of scumbling or glazing. We praise the mellow Virgilisms in Tennyson, but we are down upon the painter who repeats another's lines. The Old Masters borrowed un-

blushingly, but we are such sticklers for originality, which, after all, only means plagiarizing nature. Didn't Raphael crib his composition from Orcagna, and Michael Angelo copy Masaccio, and Tintoretto turn Michael Angelo's Samson into Jupiter? Why, in the Academy at Venice I saw—"

"Have you been to Venice?" cried Matt, eagerly.

"Herbert has been to all the galleries of Europe," said his father, impressively. "We travel abroad every year. It's part of the education of a painter. How are you to know Bellini and Tintoretto if you don't go to Venice? Velasquez and Titian cannot be fully studied by any one who has not been in Madrid; and the man who is ignorant of the treasures of the Louvre or of the Uffizi at Florence, where"—he interpolated with simulated facetiousness, laying his hand on Herbert's shoulder—"I hope to see my boy's portrait painted by his own hand one day—"

"Look at this queer stone scarab," interrupted Herbert, annoyed. "I picked it up in Egypt; comes from inside a mummy-case."

Egypt! The word fell like music on Matt's ears. The rose-light of romance illumined the uncouth beetle. Herbert hastened to exhibit his other curios: coins, medals, cameos, scarves, yataghans, pottery, ivories, with a cursive autobiographical commentary, passing rapidly to another object whenever his father threatened to take up the thread of autobiography.

And as Matt handled these picturesque trophies of travel, that wafted into the studio the aroma of foreign bazaars, the wave of hopelessness resurged, swamping even the fresh hopefulness engendered by the discovery that his cousin's craftsmanship was not so far beyond his hand, after all; all those marvellous, far-off old-world places that had disengaged themselves from his lonely readings, fair mirages thrown upon a phantasmal sky, not vaguely, but with the sensuous definiteness of a painter's vision, jostling one another like the images in a shaken kaleidoscope in an atmosphere of romantic poetry: Venice, dreaming on its waters in an enchanted moonlight; Paris, all life and light; Spain, with cathedrals and gypsies and cavaliers tinkling guitars; Sicily, with gray olive-trees and sombre cypresses and terraced gar-

dens and black-eyed peasant women with red snoods; the Rhine, haunted by nixies and robber-chiefs, meandering 'twixt crumbling castles perched on wooded crags; Egypt, with its glow and color, all lotus-blossoms and bulrushes and crocodiles and jasper idols, and bernoused Arabs galloping on silken chargers in a land of sand and sphinxes and violet shadows; the Indies, east of the sun and west of the moon, full of palm-trees and nautch-girls and bayaderes—a shifting panorama of strange exotic cities, steeped in romance and history and sunshine and semi-barbarian splendors, where the long desolation of his native winter never came, nor the clammy vapors of Britain; cities of splendid dream, where anything might happen and nothing could seem unreal; where Adventure waited masked at every street corner, and Love waved a white hand from every lattice. And in a flood of sadness, that had yet something delicious in it, he pitied himself for having been cut off from all these delectable experiences, which the happier Herbert had so facilely enjoyed.

"I know you are bored, father," said Herbert, pausing amid his exposition. "You want to get back to business, and Matt and I want to yarn."

Matt's bitterness was soothed. It thrilled him to be called Matt by this rich, refined, travelled young gentleman.

"Well, good-bye, my young friend," said his uncle, holding out his hand for the first time. "I dare say I shall see you again. Ha! Drop in any time you're passing. I think your mother will be wanting you presently, Herbert."

He moved to the door, then paused, and, turning his head uneasily, said: "And if you ever want any advice, you know, don't hesitate to ask me." And with a faint friendly nod of his Vandyke beard he went out, closing the door carefully behind him.

"Awful bore, the governor," said Herbert, stretching his arms. "He never knows when he's *de trop*."

Matt did not know what *de trop* was, except when he saw it printed, but the disrespectful tone jarred upon him.

"You owe him a good deal, it seems to me," he replied, simply.

"Hullo, hullo, my young Methodist parson!" and Herbert threw back his head in a ringing laugh which made his white

teeth gleam gayly. "Why, do you think we owe anything to our parents? They didn't marry to oblige us. I am only a tool for his ambitions."

"What do you mean?" murmured Matt.

"Oh, well, I oughtn't to talk about it, perhaps, but you're my first cousin—the first cousin I've ever had"—Matt smiled, fascinated afresh—"and, after all, it's an open secret that he wants the name of Strang to live in the annals of painting — if it couldn't be Matthew Strang, it must be Herbert Strang, and so he belongs to the minor artists' clubs. Of course, he can't get into the Limners', though he contrives to be there on business pretty often, and consoles himself by using their note-paper; but at the Gillray and the Reynolds' they dare not blackball him, because the committee always owe him money, or want to sell him pictures; but I dare say they laugh at him behind his back when he jaws to them about art in general, and my talents in particular. It's confoundedly annoying. Oh, I've been forgetting to smoke. What can be the matter with me?" And he pulled out a lizard-skin case, from which Matt, not liking to refuse, drew forth a cigarette.

"But what good does he do by belonging to those clubs?" he asked.

"Oh, he likes it, for one thing," replied Herbert, striking a match and holding it to Matt's cigarette. "My belief is, he only went into the picture business to rub shoulders with artists, though where the charm comes in I have never been able to find out, for a duller, a more illiterate set of fellows I never wish to meet. Shop is all they can talk. And then, of course, it's good for business. But in the background lurks, I feel sure, the idea of advancing my interests, of accumulating back-stairs influence, of pulling the ropes that shall at last lift me into the proud position of R.A. Nay, who knows?" he said, puffing out his first wreath of smoke—"President of the Royal Academy!" And he laughed melodiously.

"Well, but—" began Matt, inhaling the delicious scent of the tobacco.

"Well, *but*," echoed Herbert. "That's just it. My tastes are not considered in the matter at all. Art! Art! Art! Nothing

but Art rammed down my throat till I'm sick of the sight of a canvas. I was a connoisseur in my cradle, and sucked a maul-stick instead of a monkey-on-a-stick, and I live in the midst of Art and out of the profits of it. It's pictures, pictures everywhere, and not a— Oh, have a brandy-and-soda, won't you? Don't stand about as if you were going." Matt obediently dropped upon a lounge that yielded deliciously to his pressure. The fragrant smoke curled about his face, while his cousin made pleasant play with popping corks and gurgling liquids.

"But don't you really like painting?" he asked, in astonishment.

"I like some things in it well enough," replied Herbert, "but it's such beastly drudgery. All this wretched copying of models is no better than photography. And a camera would do the thing in a thousandth part of the time. I always work from photographs when I can."

"But is that artistic?" said Matt, slightly shocked.

"It's the only thing worthy of the artist's dignity. The bulk of art is journeyman's work. Besides, lots of 'em do it nowadays—with magic-lanterns to boot! Because one man by a fluke happens to be a better drawing-machine than another, is he to be counted the greater artist?" Matt felt small before this answer to his secret criticism. "Did you ever see the camera-obscura at the Crystal Palace? That does landscapes in a jiffy that we should go messing over for months. And then think of the looking-glass! They talk of Rembrandt and Franz Hals. I'll back a bedroom mirror to put more life into its portraits than either of 'em. Why, if some process were invented —a sort of magic mirror to fix the image, living and colored, in the glass—here's luck!"—he clinked his glass against Matt's— "the governor would have to shut up shop."

"Yes, but the mirror hasn't got any imagination," urged Matt, setting down his glass refreshed, the glow of brandy in his throat lending added intellectual charm to the discussion.

"Oh, I don't know! There are distorting mirrors," rejoined Herbert, laughing. "But you are quite right. Art is selection; nature *à travers d'un tempérament.* Art is autobiography. But painting, which somehow monopolizes the name of Art, is

really the lowest form of Art. Nature is full of scenes quite as good as Art. Doesn't Ruskin say an artist has got to copy Nature? But is there anything in Nature so closely akin to a poem, or to Ruskin's own prose, or to a symphony of Beethoven, as a moonlit sea or a beautiful woman is to a picture? What is the skylark's song compared to Shelley's, or the music of the sea to Mozart's? The real creation is in the other arts, which are called literature and music. They are an addition to Nature —something extra. Painting and acting—these are mere reduplications of Nature. Perhaps I was unfair to painting. That, at least, fixes the beauty of Nature, but acting is merely an evanescent imitation of the temporary."

The younger man sat half bewildered beneath this torrent of words and quotations; the respect Herbert had lost in his eyes by his draughtsmanship (a trifling matter under Herbert's disdainful analysis) returning, multiplied to reverence, and with a fresh undercurrent of humility and envy. How much there was to know in the world, how many languages and books and arts! How could he mix with Herbert and his set without being found out?

"That's why I prefer literature and music," said Herbert. "But then I'm not my own master, like you—you lucky beggar. If I had my way, pictures would be nothing but color-schemes, sheer imagination, with no relation to truth of Nature. What do I care how her shadows fall, if they don't fall gracefully? And then why must my lines imitate Nature's? That's where the Japanese are so great. Don't smoke that fag-end! Have another!" And he threw his cigarette-case across to his magnetized listener. It was the first time in his hard, busy existence Matt had ever heard any one talk like a book, discussing abstract relations of Art and Life.

"I wish I knew as much as you," he said, naïvely.

"I wish I was as free as you," retorted Herbert, laughingly; "though I certainly wouldn't employ my liberty as you do. What in Heaven's name made you want to study Art? I did laugh when the governor told the mater of your letter. I was just in the roughest grind, and felt like writing you on the sly to warn you."

"I don't think I should have taken your advice," said Matt, with an embarrassed laugh.

"But what made you come to London, anyhow? Why didn't you go to Paris?"

"To Paris!"

"Yes; there's no teaching to be got in London."

"No?" Matt turned pale.

"No. At least, that's what everybody says in England. Paris alone has the tradition. Once it was Holland, once Florence, and now it's Paris. Why, in Paris any fellows who club together can get the biggest men to visit them free, gratis, for nothing. Here the big pots prefer the society of the swells."

"Then why are you not in Paris?" asked Matt, rallying.

"Ah! That's where my governor is such an idiot. He pretends to think there's more chance for a man who's been through the Academy Schools; he gets known to the R.A.'s, and all that. But his real reason is that he's afraid to trust me in Paris by myself."

"No?" said Matt, in sympathetic incredulity.

"Yes; that's why he had this room knocked into a studio for me—it always reminds me of a nursery, at the top of the house—and even selects my female models, knows their parents, and that sort of thing. It's all sheer selfishness, I tell you, and I'm just sick of all this perpetual fussing and worrying over me, as if I were a prize pig or a race-horse. A man of twenty-three not allowed to have a studio or chambers of his own! You don't realize how lucky you are, my boy. If I could afford it I'd chuck up the governor to-morrow. But I'm dependent on him for every farthing. And all he allows me for pocket-money is—well, you'd never guess—"

Matt did not make the attempt; he judged Herbert might think meanly of even a pound a week, but he did not dare to hazard a guess.

"Three hundred a year! And out of that I've got to get my clothes and pay my models, confound 'em!"

Matt stared in startled, reverential envy.

"Yes, you may well stare. Why, you know yourself if you buy a woman a bracelet it runs away with a month's allowance.

But, talking of clothes, you'll have to get better than those things, if you ever want me to be seen with you."

"These are quite new," murmured Matt, in alarm.

"*And* original," added Herbert. "I'll have to introduce you to my tailor."

"Is—is he dear?" Matt stammered.

"If you pay him," said Herbert, dryly.

"Oh, I always pay," protested Matt.

"You're lucky. *I* have to economize."

Matt thought suddenly of William Gregson with a throb of gratitude. At least his wardrobe boasted of unimpeachable boots. Then he suddenly espied a small battalion of foot-gear ranged against a wall—black boots, brown boots, patent shoes, brown shoes, boots with laces, boots with beautiful buttons—and he relapsed into his primitive humility. Uneasy lest Herbert should insist on equipping him similarly, he was glad to remember that Herbert's mother was expecting her boy, and with a murmur to that effect rose to go.

"Nonsense!" said Herbert, "I'm not due till dinner-time; but if you must be going, I think I'll just stroll a little. You go towards Oxford Street, don't you?"

"Ye-es," faltered Matt, who was a little frightened at the idea that his dainty cousin might accompany him to his lodging.

"All right. I'll just go to the club to see if there are any letters. There's another of your privileges, confound you! I can't have any letters come to my own place."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Do you think I'd have the governor nosing my correspondence? He'd be always asking questions. It's a jolly little club—I'll put you up for it if you like. Take another cigarette; take half a dozen; put 'em in your pocket."

As they were going down-stairs, Matt said he would like to say good-bye to Madame, so they passed into the sitting-room.

"*Au revoir*, my dear nephew, *au revoir!*" said Madame, shaking both his hands. "I said you and Herbert would love each other. You will find your sixpence awaiting you on the desk."

CHAPTER IV

THE PICTURE-MAKERS

"Funny I've never been to see your place. I must look you up one day." Thus Herbert at uncertain intervals, but he never carried out his threat. His life was too full, and he had been accustomed from childhood to have the mountain come to Mohammed. And so, gradually, Matt, who had at first lived half apprehensive of an exposure, half wishful that Herbert should become rudely aware of his real position, surrendered himself to the magnetism of his cousin's manner, and weakly tried to live up to that young gentleman's misconception of him whenever they were together; even submitting to a morning suit and an evening dress from Herbert's tailor for an undefined sum at an unmentioned date. For if the disadvantages of Herbert's society were many, if he had to starve for days to return Herbert's club hospitality at a restaurant, still he was satisfied the game was worth the candle. From Herbert he felt himself acquiring polish and refinement and impeccable English and social lore; Herbert was an intellectual stimulus, with thoughts to give away and the newest poets to lend; Herbert was bright and gay, charming away the vapors of youthful despondency. But, above all, Herbert sometimes allowed him to work in his studio, amid the sensuous beauty of draping and decoration and statuary that lapped his artistic nature like a soft summer sea—a privilege inestimable, but, in view of the mere model, worth at least all the extra money this friendship cost him. It befell thus:

On Matt's second visit Herbert said, good-naturedly:

"I've just laid my palette. You sit down. Let's see what you can do."

"May I?" cried Matt, eagerly. There was a costume-model on the throne—a dark-eyed beauty in Oriental drapery.

Herbert relinquished the brush and threw himself upon his back on the couch, puffing lazily at his cigarette.

"By Jove!" he said, after ten minutes, "you've put that in all right. But what a juicy style you've got! Where did you get that from?"

"I can't do it any other way," said Matt, apologetically.

"The governor told me you're under Tarmigan. He never taught you that?"

"No; but that's the way I've always worked. I did a lot of portraits in Nova Scotia."

"The devil you did! No wonder you've made money, confound you! I thought you were a blooming ignoramus just come over to learn your pictorial pothooks and hangers."

"I thought so, too," said Matt, flushing with pleasure and modesty.

"None of your sarcasm, you beggar. You can finish the head if you like."

"Thank you," said Matt, flutteringly. He felt as if Herbert were heaping coals of fire upon his own head, repaying his first secret depreciation by over-generous praise. He painted away bravely, soon losing himself in the happy travail of execution.

"I must come down to your place and see your work," said Herbert, looking up from the volume of Swinburne in which he had immersed himself.

"Oh, there isn't much!" said Matt, hastily. "I'll bring you some little things next time. Only I don't want your father to see them—they're not for sale."

"You're quite right," said Herbert. "Don't show 'em to him. Hush!"

"What's the matter?" asked Matt, turning his head.

"Talk of the—Old Gentleman," said Herbert.

The brush dropped from the painter's palsied fingers. He felt like one caught red-handed. He had already come in, somewhat surreptitiously, through the side door, in obedience to Herbert's recommendation, and to be found using Herbert's appliances and model would be the acme of guiltiness.

The alarm was false, but thenceforward "The Old Gentleman" indicated Matthew Strang the elder. For they had frequent occasion to fear his advent, since Matt came often, tempted from his gloomy back room to the beautiful light studio, where he was allowed not only to do bits of Herbert's work while Herbert read or gossiped with the model, but occasionally to set up another easel and use the same model. But they were only detected together twice by the Vandyke beard and the velvet coat, and on one occasion Herbert had had time to resume the brush, and on another to pose Matt as a model.

"The Old Gentleman's rather grumpy about you," he admitted, with his customary candor. "I've had to tell the servant not to mention your coming so often. The mater's mashed on you, and I suppose he's a bit jealous. She wanted to ask you to our dinner-party last night—we had two Associates, and a Scotch Academician, and an American millionaire who buys any rot, and an art critic who praises it—but he said one didn't give dinner-parties for one's relations, but for strangers."

As Matt had already dined once *en famille*, with Madame's guileless homage at his side to put him at ease, he did not feel himself hardly used.

His position with "The Old Gentleman" was not improved by his demeanor on an occasion when, meeting him in the doorway, Herbert's father, instead of raising remonstrant eyebrows, astonished him by asking if he would like to see the masterpieces he had in stock. Matt did not know that this generous offer was due to the death of a member of the Institute whose water-colors had been accumulating on Matthew Strang's hands, and who now, even before his funeral, was showing signs of a posthumous "boom;" he replied eagerly that nothing could be a greater favor. The picture-dealer waved his jewelled hand with pompous geniality, and, mounting one flight of stairs, with the hand on Matt's shoulder, ushered him into the holy of holies, a chamber religious with purple curtains and hushed with soft carpets, where the more precious pictures reposed behind baize veils that for possible purchasers were lifted with a reverent silence bespeaking a hundred extra guineas. Long habit of ritual awe made Matthew Strang's hands pious even before his nephew.

But his nephew's expected ecstasies were tempered by unexpected criticism. In an eminent Academician's portrait of a lady, Matt pointed out that the eyes were wrong, that pupils should be round, not squashy, and that the hot shadows made by the Indian reds under the nose were inspired by Romney. He questioned the veracity of a landscape by a costly name, demurring to the light on the under sides of the leaves as impossible under the conditions depicted; and in a historical composition by an old English master he found a lack of subtlety in the legs, and a stringy feeling throughout.

All this wanton depreciation of goods by one who was not even an interested bargainer galled the picture-dealer, conscious of overflowing good-nature, and prepared for a natural return in breathless adoration. So when Matt suggested that in a celebrated picture of a sea-beach the sea had no fluidity and was falling on the fishermen's heads, he lost his temper and cried, sarcastically: "I think you had better open a school for R.A.'s, young man!"

Matt flushed, feeling he had been impertinent; then his sense of justice repudiated the rebuke. It was of no use pretending a thing was right when it wasn't, he protested. He didn't profess to get things right himself, and he only wished he could do anything half as good as the worst of these pictures. But he did know when he was wrong, even if it wouldn't come right for all his sweating and fuming.

"A young man oughtn't to talk till he can paint," interrupted his uncle, severely.

"But you know what Dr. Johnson says, sir," Matt remonstrated. "If you can't make a plum-pudding, it's no sign you can't judge one."

"Plum-puddings and pictures are very different things," said Matthew Strang, stiffly, as though insulted by an implicit association with a pastry-cook.

"My, that's ripping!" cried Matt, abandoning the argument at the sudden sight of a fine mellow piece of portrait-painting. "How the Old Masters got the grays! Oh, why don't people wear wigs nowadays?"

This outburst of enthusiasm made the private exhibition close

more auspiciously than had seemed probable, but Matt was never again invited to inspect the sacred treasures. His relations with his relatives came to be limited to morning visits to Herbert, whose stairs he ascended half secretly, to watch the progress of his cousin's studies for an ambitious picture of "Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar," the models for which he also used himself. He left his own studies behind at Herbert's request—though reluctantly, for he was not at all satisfied with them—as a species of payment for the privilege. When, through his interest in this coming masterpiece of Herbert's, and under the fascination of this delightful and flattering friendship, he forgot his pride and fell into the habit of regular morning work in Herbert's company, lunch somehow came up regularly for three, though Madame was not supposed to be aware of his presence. Those were joyous lunches, full of laughter and levity, made picturesque by the romantic dress or undress of the third party, and extra palatable for Matt—when his first reluctance wore off—by the fact that they saved dinners.

"Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar" was intended for next year's Academy, Herbert told him, and he gathered from his cousin's casual observations that it had also to be submitted beforehand to the professors at the schools, for there were strange cramping conditions as to the size of the canvas and the principal figure. But he was less interested in its destination than in its draughtsmanship. He saw the tableau in his mind's eye the moment Herbert told him he was engaged upon it, for the scene had often figured itself to his fancy in those far-off days when his mother read the Bible to her helpless children by random prickings. Nebuchadnezzar's dream was one of the lucky chapters, to which Matt listened without distraction as the narrative unrolled itself pictorially before his inner vision. He rapidly sketched his conception, then found he disliked it, and ultimately remembered he had unconsciously reproduced the grouping of figures in the illustration in his mother's Bible, one of those he had colored in his childish naughtiness. Herbert protested this was no drawback, but Matt went away brooding over a more artistic arrangement, and dreamed that he was mangled by lions in a den. But in the

morning he brought a new grouping for Herbert's consideration. This Herbert picked to pieces as being against the canons.

"Don't forget it's for the Academy," he said. "We mustn't make mistakes in grammar. Some of the old buffers are worse than Tarmigan."

"Damn Tarmigan!" cried Matt, but he had to admit ruefully that his scheme was full of solecisms. He had by this time as full an acquaintance with the rules as his senior, but with Herbert they had become instinctive. It was with a renewed sense of inferiority to his cousin, paradoxically combined with an inward raging against the Lindley Murrays of art, that Matt abandoned point after point under Herbert's searching criticism. Herbert's gift of pulling other people's ideas to pieces amounted to genius. But he abandoned his original sketch also, dismissed his projected models, and devoted himself to arguing out the composition afresh.

Under the banter of the art-critic smoking cynically on the sofa, Matt was put upon his mettle to group all the figures and dispose the lines so as to escape the pitfalls lurking on every side, and likewise satisfy the conditions of the pedantic professors.

"We must get as much subject as possible into it," explained Herbert. "They give you such a small space—only fifty by forty—that you must crowd all you know into it."

Gradually the composition took shape, with infinite discussion, daily renewed. Matt was for pillars with curious effects of architecture. Herbert objected that pillars would make the perspective too difficult, and only consented on the laughing stipulation that Matt should work out the angles. And Herbert was very averse from Matt's suggestions of strange original attitudes for the figures.

"That 'll make some awfully stiff foreshortening," he grumbled.

"What does it matter? You'll have models," Matt would reply.

"It's all very well. You haven't got to do the work," Herbert would retort.

And when the grouping was settled, the color and the dra

pery brought fresh argumentation, the young men working as at a chess problem till the puzzle of arriving at the original without deserting the Academic was solved. And as, in the solution of a chess problem by a pair of heads, the suggestion of the winning moves has been so obscured by the indefinite suggestion of abortive moves by both, that neither remembers to which the final discovery of the right track was due, so Matt would have been surprised to be told that the ideas that had been retained were all his, and the ideas that had been rejected were all Herbert's. The thought of apportioning their shares in the final scheme never crossed his mind, even though it was his hand that always held the experimentative pencil. Indeed, the technical interest of the task had absorbed every other thought, and the details of the tentative were lost in the triumph of the achieved, and obscured as by a cigarette cloud of happy mornings.

And then Herbert told his father he must have new models fresh to studios.

"I don't want 'em from Haverstock Hill or Lillie Road," he said—"women who've been hung in every gallery. I don't want your Italians from Hatton Garden, or professionals that any of the other fellows might get hold of and extract my ideas from. Besides, new faces will give me a better chance."

And Matthew Strang the Elder recognized there was some reason in his son's request; but he pointed out it was not so easy to go outside the stock families, especially for figure models, and that old hands often helped the painter. But Herbert easily overrode his objections. It was only the conventional attitudinizings and foreshortenings which they understood, the quotations of art, which he was now about to abandon in deference to paternal prejudice; and so Matthew Strang, morbidly solicitous, obediently brought picturesque Orientals for Daniel and the King and the satraps and the counsellors, and blushing brunettes for the beauties of the Court; and Herbert set to work to reproduce in large on the canvas Matt's rough charcoal scheme of the whole, and his own or Matt's studies of the parts; and when Herbert blundered, Matt suggested with pastel a change of tone or color or outline, sometimes even taking up

the brush when Herbert was lazy — as Herbert often was. Matt was never surprised to find the work no more advanced than when he had gone away the morning before, for Herbert's mind was on many and more important things. The Academy students were rehearsing a burlesque which he had written for their dramatic society, and he sometimes slipped out to the rehearsals, lamenting to Matt that, through his father's insistence on steady work, he could not even play in his own piece. The only recreation allowed him was a ride in the Park on a hired hack, and even that, he grumbled, was to enable him to salute cantering R.A.'s. Sometimes he went to tea with the girl students at restaurants. Sometimes he went to balls, and was too tired on the day after to do anything but describe them. They were always painters' dances; "The Old Gentleman blocks others," he said. On one occasion the host was an R.A., whose son was a fellow-student at the schools, and then "The Old Gentleman chortled."

Then there was the students' ball, to which he convoyed Matt, who was quite dazzled by the elegance and refinement of the ladies, and almost afraid to speak to his partners, and torn afresh with envy of the beautiful life from which he had been, and must long be, shut out; not losing his discomfort till, after the supper (at which he tasted champagne for the first time), Herbert's special circle danced the Lancers with a zest and *entrain* that horrified some of the matrons, and brought back to Matt the dear old nights when he took the barn floor with little Ruth Hailey, under the placid gaze of the cows and amid the odors of the stable and the hay-mow.

For other memorable experiences, too, Matt was indebted to his easy-going cousin. There was Herbert's club, the Bohemian, a cosey little place favored by actors and journalists, caricatures of whose sensuous faces lined the walls in company with oil-paintings and sketches more sensuous still. Matt felt measureless reverence for the men he brushed against here. He had seen some of them before in the illustrated papers which he read in shop-windows or penny news-rooms or Herbert's studio, and he trembled lest they should detect, from his embarrassment amid the varied knives and forks and

glasses, that he was only a boor with less education than the waiters. He wondered what the clever, cultured people — scraps of whose conversation floated across to him amid the popping of soda-water corks — would think if they knew he had planted potatoes, chopped logs, made sugar in the woods, and climbed masts and steeples. In the new snobbishness with which their society had infected him he could not see that these things were education, not humiliation, and he was glad that even Herbert knew little of his history, and asked less. Of other people's histories, on the other hand, Matt heard a great deal. "Bubbles" had robbed him of his belief in royal virtue; in the smoking-room of the Bohemians society fell to pieces like a house of cards, in building which, as Herbert once said, the knaves alone had been used. It was a racing, dicing, drinking, swindling, fornicating fraternity, worm-eaten with hypocrisy. Sincerity or simplicity was "all my eye;" there was always money or a woman or position in the background.

"They talk a lot of scandal," Matt once complained.

"My dear Matt," remonstrated Herbert, "it's not scandal; it's gossip. Brixton gossips about who marries whom, Bohemia about who lives with whom. Scandal implies censure."

Despite the scandal (or the gossip), Matt was full of curiosity to see this strange new life of clubs and restaurants and theatres (to which Herbert sometimes got paper admissions), this feverish realm of intellect and gayety, where nobody seemed to want for anything; but it sometimes came over him with an odd flash of surprise and bitterness, as he caught the gleam of white scented shoulders, or saw heavy-jowled satyrs swilling champagne, that all this settled luxury had been going on while he was tramping the snowy roads of what might have been another planet.

The feeling wore off as the London season advanced, and the tide of luxurious life rolled along the great sunny thoroughfares, or flecked the midnight streets with darting points of fire. His Puritan conscience, curiously persisting beneath all the scepticism engendered by his mother's tragedy, had at first acquiesced but uneasily in the unscriptural view of life

that seemed to prevail around him. But fainter and fainter grew its prickings, the sensuous in him ripened in this liberal atmosphere, and that Greek conception of a beautiful world which, budding for him in solitude, had been almost nipped by the same cruel tragedy, flowered now in the heats of an ardent city.

"The Old Gentleman" was in such good-humor at the surprising progress of Herbert's "Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar" that Madame's gentle remonstrance that he ought to do something for Matt touched a responsive chord, and before the Academy sending-in day Matt had the privilege of being escorted by his uncle, in company with Herbert, to a *conversazione* at the Reynolds Club, of which the dealer was a member. Herbert was soon lost in the crush of second-rate painters and engravers and obscurely famous visitors who gathered before the members' would-be Academy pictures that lined the walls, or the second-rate entertainers who struck attitudes on the daïs; but Matt was too nervous amid this congestion of celebrities to detach himself from his uncle, who did the honors grandly, pointing out the lions of the club with a proprietorial air. Matt could not but feel that his uncle (who was of the swallow-tailed minority) was himself one of the lions of the club, and in very truth he was its most distinguished-looking member. "The refreshments are not gratis," he told Matt, "but of course you can have anything you like at my expense. Will you have a cup of coffee, or are you one of those degenerate young men who can't live without whiskey-and-water?" But Matt had no appetite for anything; he was too fluttered by this close contact with the giants of the brush. He listened eagerly to morsels of their dialogue, strained his vision to see them through the smoky, lamplit air; critical as he might have been, and was, before their work, the men themselves were shrouded in a vague splendor of achievement. They had all been hung.

There seemed a good deal of talk about a virulent article of comprehensive condemnation in the art columns of the *Saturday Spectator;* everybody seemed to have read it and nobody to have written it. For the rest, compliments crossed like smiling couples in the quadrille.

"What a stunning landscape that is of yours, Rapper!" said Wilfred Smith, a journalist so ignorant of painting that he was suspected of art criticism. "Quite like a Corot."

"Oh, it's nothing; just knocked off for a color-blind old Johnny who admires me," replied Rapper, deprecatingly. He was a moon-faced man with a double eyeglass on a gold cord. "It's rotten, really; I'm awfully ashamed of it." And he elbowed his way towards it.

"So he ought to be, and so ought you to be ashamed, Wilfred," said Morrison, the poet of pessimism and music-halls. "It's just like those splashes of silvery gray they sell for Corots on the Boulevards."

"That's what I meant," said Wilfred. "Didn't you see I was guying him? Hullo, Clinch, I've been admiring that water-color of yours. What an exquisite face the girl has!"

"It isn't a water-color, you —— fool; it's a pastel," said Clinch, gruffly.

"That's what I meant—not an oil-color," replied Wilfred, unabashed.

Matt stared with interest at the picture, which was just beside him. The face was indeed exquisite with the peculiar delicacy of pastel. He looked at the painter's own face, coarse and splotched, the teeth fouled by endless tobacco. It was as though Pan should paint Psyche.

"I see the *Saturday Spectator* doesn't understand your 'Carolina,' Clinch," said the poet, smiling.

Clinch damned the *Saturday Spectator* in a string of unlovely oaths, which were drowned by the music of a violin and a piano. He did not care a twopenny damn what people scribbled about him; his pictures were there, just the same.

"But what does 'Carolina' mean, old man?" said the poet, appealingly.

Clinch replied that literary fellows were invariably sanguinary fools who fancied that painting meant things and could be explained in words. He had just been reading about the significance of Leonardo's backgrounds in some rotten book on the Renaissance. In reality those bits of landscape must have been put in and painted out a dozen times before Leonardo had struck

the color-harmony he tried after. Morrison retorted that if the art-critic could paint he would become a partisan, tied to his own talent. As it was, he could approach other men's pictures without prejudice.

"But also without knowledge," Clinch replied, goaded. He pointed out brutally that to learn painting meant to learn a new set of symbols. "If you wanted to paint that lamp," he said, "you'd probably put down a —— line to get that edge, and so lose all the —— softness. A real line wouldn't look a —— bit like the real thing. Same with color; real red wouldn't give red. Painting is all subterfuge, optical illusion. Color and form are only an affair of relations."

He went on to explain, with punctilious profanities, that to study the relation of that lamp to the piano-lid was enough for a picture; treated perfectly, there would be a poetry and mystery about it. Beauty, too, was only an affair of relations, and in "Carolina" he had been trying to get a beautiful relation between two ugly things, and an early Georgian feeling into a nineteenth-century interior, with a scientific accuracy of tones known only to modern French art.

Matt listened eagerly, wincing a little at the livelier oaths, but conscious of piquant perspectives, of novel artistic vision, which, if not quite intelligible, was in refreshing contrast with Tarmigan's old-fashioned orthodoxy.

"But you had the same woman in your picture of the 'Salvation Lass,'" persisted the poet.

Clinch explained that if writing chaps knew what it was to hunt for a satisfactory model, they'd thank their stars they didn't know a palette from a planchette. A "swell woman" that really expressed your idea you couldn't get to sit for you, and if you could get her you couldn't swear at her. Besides, it was his ambition to create a new type of feminine beauty, and impose her on his period — *une femme de Clinch!* Wilfred Smith took mental notes, prepared henceforward to expound Clinch to an ignorant world.

"It's about time he got a new model, anyway," he said, when the repulsive-looking artist had moved off.

"Or painted her," added Morrison, dryly.

Matt had a flash of resentment. The picture was to him a dainty dream of cool color and graceful form. Despite his association with Herbert, he did not yet understand the temperament that strides to Wit over Truth's body.

"Isn't it funny a man like that should draw such refined women?" he could not help remarking to his cicerone.

Matthew Strang assumed an oracular expression. "Art's just a knack," he said. "You've got to be born with it. I wasn't, more's the pity; but Herbert makes up for it, thank Heaven! Art's got nothing to do with character. I've paid many a man to do me so many easel-pictures a year, and do you suppose I ever got them? The rogues get drunk or die or something, but they never come up to time."

Matt was puzzled. If Art demanded anything, it seemed to him it was steadfastness and sobriety. The truth about it seemed to lie in those lines he had read in a volume of Matthew Arnold, borrowed from Herbert:

> "Young, gay,
> Radiant, adorned outside; a hidden ground
> Of thought and of austerity within."

A sudden fear that he was not a genius himself was like a vivisector's knife through his heart, laying bare with painful incision its secret hope.

"Do you think Clinch gets his effects without bothering?" he asked, with anxiety.

"O heavens! no," said Matthew Strang, authoritatively. "I once watched him at work. He was squatted on a tiny stool, looking up at his picture, and painting upward. He had a cigarette in his mouth, which he was always relighting. Every now and then he would sigh heavily, or swear at himself or his model, and sometimes he would go and lie on the hearth-rug and stare solemnly at the canvas; then jump up, give one touch, swear if it went wrong, paint it out, and then go and stand in the corner with his face to the wall, probably in meditation, but looking exactly like a naughty little boy at school."

Matt smiled, half at the picture of Clinch in the corner, half from relief at finding that even men who swore and drank far

more than he did suffered quite as acutely in the parturition of the Beautiful. He fell back on the theory of an essential inner delicacy behind the occasionally coarse envelope of artistic genius, just as grossness could lurk beneath a gentlemanly refinement.

They ultimately found Herbert in the billiard-room, with a cue in one hand and a "soda-and-whiskey" in the other. "I don't want to look at the pictures," he protested. "If they're decent I'll see them in the Academy, and if they're rot it's waste of time seeing them at all. As for the entertainment, you can get a better at any music-hall—at least, so I've been told." Nevertheless, he himself took Matt to another *conversazione* the same week, the far more homely gathering of the St. George's Sketching Club, where the refreshments *were* gratis and evening dress was taboo, and really famous people scrambled for the bread-and-cheese and beer, of which there was not enough, and members disported themselves in their models' costumes for the edification of a company which had turned its back on their pictures. For the Academy itself Matt paid his shilling, into such extravagant habits had he slipped since the days of his arrival in London, when a National Gallery catalogue was beyond his far fatter purse. But he came away much less inspired than from that momentous visit, his imagination untouched, save once or twice, as by Erle-Smith's personalized projections of mediæval romance, in which the absence of real atmosphere seemed only natural. There were so many smooth portraits of uninteresting people that he was reminded drearily of his Nova-Scotian drudgery, when his heaven-scaling spirit had to stoop to portray and please some tedious farmer who was sometimes not even picturesque. It did not occur to him how unfair was the latent comparison with the National Gallery; he forgot that Art is short and the Academy long, that one can no more expect a batch of great pictures every year than a batch of great novels or of great symphonies.

Tarmigan had a picture of "The Rape of the Sabines." It was hung on the line, and Grainger's was very proud of it. In the discussion on the Academy (which supplied the class with the materials for a fortnight's carping) it was the only picture

that escaped even "Bubbles's" depreciation, though he declared he would never himself paint like that, which the curly-headed wag eagerly admitted. One of the students had secured a place in the "skies," and his success made Matt regret he himself had not dared to send in.

Grainger's own contribution had been rejected, which made his pupils think more highly of themselves.

Matt was more interested in the Azure Art Gallery, a little exhibition (mainly of landscapes with violet shadows) held by some young men about whom Herbert was enthusiastic; for they did not attempt, said he, to vie either with the camera or the *conte*. "If painting be an art at all," he contended, "it can only be so by virtue of ignoring Nature. As Goethe said, 'We call art Art because it is not Nature.' The musician works up notes, the poet syllables into a music unlike anything in Nature, and so must the painter work up Nature's colors and forms under the sole guidance of his artistic instinct. And whatever can be better expressed in words has no place in painting. These young men's pictures tell no stories, and no truths either. They are merely concerned with color and line."

Matt afterwards found that, with the exception of a couple of Scotchmen, these young men by no means accepted Herbert's account of their aims; indeed, they rather regarded it as satirical, for to give truer impressions of Nature was precisely their boast and glory. Although Matt could not always credit them with success in this, still he found a note of life and fantasy in their work. He was especially struck by Cornpepper's "Chimney on Fire in Fitzroy Street"—a flight of sparks falling and curving in a golden rain, in vivid contrast with the dark, starlit sky above and the black mass of spectators below, faintly illumined by street-lamps, and broken at the extreme end by the brassy gleam of the fire-engine tearing up the street. There were inaccuracies of detail, but Matt was immensely impressed by the originality of the subject and the touch of weirdness, and it was with joy that he accepted Herbert's offer to take him to the Azure Art Club, where Cornpepper and his clique mostly forgathered. Since Herbert had misinterpreted them to his cousin, Matt had read a good deal about them in the papers, and

they had held forth brilliantly to interviewers on the veracity of their rendering of Nature, Cornpepper going so far as to claim that you could not look at his landscapes without feeling —from the color of stone and sea, from the tints of the sky and the disposition of the clouds—what o'clock it was. Whereupon the interviewer had consulted a study of poppies on a cliff, and reported that it was half-past eleven, Cornpepper crying "Correct!" All of which did not fail to provoke counterblasts from the Academic camp and from the irresponsible concocters of facetious paragraphs.

It was all very small—the feeble British refraction of the great Gallic battle then waging, of the campaign of *plein air* and modern subject against bituminous landscapes and classic conventions, the expurgated English edition of the eternal battle of youth and age, spiritless as the bouts of boxers in a Quaker land, *sans* prize-rings or hero-worshippers; the shadowy warfare of art in a Puritan country vibrating only to politics and religion, indifferent to style, gauging literature merely by its message and art by its idea.

But Matt was not a true-born Briton, and his own aversion from an unreal Nature doctored and tricked up, in which an artificial chiaroscuro took the place of observation and atmosphere, led him into instant sympathy with this painting of "real moments," with this presentation of "Nature caught in the fact," as Cornpepper brilliantly defined the Impressionism he had smuggled over from Paris. Even if Nature was not so violet as she was painted, Matt felt the mistake was on the right side. And who but Cornpepper had revealed and interpreted the mystery and poetry of the night? True, he was rather staggered to remember, it was impossible to paint the night with your eye on the object. The night side of Nature might be caught in the fact; it could not be arrested in the fact.

Herbert was not a member of the Azure Art Club; they had to call on a man in Kensington to get him to take them there. He proved to be no other than the moon-faced Rapper, whom Herbert had invited to invite them to dinner.

"He's an awful duffer," he said, enviously, "but he has a flat of his own and an income of his own, and he's had the run of

Copenhagen, Paris, and Antwerp. They say Copenhagen is worse than Paris."

Rapper made them stay to admire his rooms. "Don't look at my pictures," he said; "that's only a portrait I'm doing of Riggs, the bucket-shop keeper. I'm an awful duffer; why I should get so many commissions at a hundred and fifty guineas when there's lots of geniuses starving, I never can make out. I suppose it's because I don't want the money—I shall only blue it at Monte Carlo. I've only just come back from the country—a J.P., an awful screw. He made me do him and his wife for two-fifty. Still, they're only half-lengths. Do try some of this Burgundy; it's genuine. I import it direct from a small grower. I get a huge barrel for five pounds, and pay three pounds duty, and get hundreds of bottles out of it. People don't know how to get wine in England. Oh, do please look at that Limoges enamel over the mantel-piece, Mr. Strang; it's far better worth looking at than that daub of a library."

"I always prefer to look at pictures," said Matt, apologetically.

"It *is* rather a strong bit of color," admitted Rapper.

"Yes. Do you think the light is accounted for?" asked Matt. "That red glow—"

"Don't you see the library lamp?" rejoined Rapper.

"Yes, but the shade's off; and even then, isn't it more like firelight?"

"Not a bit of it!" replied Rapper, hotly. "Do you suppose I didn't study the effects with a lighted lamp? That's a good bit of action in the old scholar's arm, reaching for the book."

Matt examined it carefully.

"The forearm is a little out of drawing, isn't it—a little too long?" he asked, timidly.

"My dear fellow, the model had an unusually long forearm. You don't suppose everybody is alike. Of course it isn't near finished yet. But really I was trying for color more than for line; and, after all, it's the careless draughtsmanship of a man who *can* draw. It attracted quite a lot of notice at the Azure Art Gallery last year, but I put a big price on it, so that it shouldn't sell, and I'd have time to work it up. That's a little bust of

myself; it's only plaster of Paris bronzed over. I model ever so much better than I paint, but nobody will give me a commission. Isn't it funny? Do have some more of the Burgundy. I'm not much of an artist, but I flatter myself I do know a good wine."

Before they left he presented them with photographs of his library picture, apparently forgetting that he hadn't near finished it.

"I say, I can't go about with you if you go on like this," whispered Herbert to Matt, as Rapper lingered to extinguish his gas and lock his door. "Fancy telling a chap his faults. You mustn't go by me and my Nebuchadnezzar. I rather like to be pitched into. It keeps a fellow from getting conceited."

"I didn't know," Matt murmured, with a new admiration for Herbert, who had already become a hero to him, moving so brilliantly amid all these shining circles. The three young men got into a hansom and smoked Rapper's cigars. At the little club, which was only ten minutes off, they dined in a long, narrow, drab-painted room, with a billiard-table near the door. Several men, whose work Matt had studied with interest, were dining in their vicinity. Matt strained his ears to catch their conversation, but it seemed to be all about the billiard-table, an apparently recent acquisition. At last, to his joy, he was introduced to some of the most famous—to Butler, tall, dark, muscular, and frock-coated, most erratic of etchers, most slap-dash of painters; to the foul-mouthed, dainty-fingered Clinch; to Gurney, slim, youthful, and old-faced, habited in tweeds, the latest recruit, an earnest disciple of every master in turn, old or new, always in superlatives of eulogy or abuse, and untaught by his own gyrations to respect a past adoration or to tone down a present; to Greme, more barefacedly boyish than even Herbert, a blonde youth credited by his admirers with a charming new blond vision of Nature, though the Philistines contended that all he did was to get water-color effects with oils; to Simpson, who ground his own colors, and had mysterious glazes and varnishes, and was consumed by an unshared anxiety as to the permanence of his pictures; and—oh, awful joy!—to the great Cornpepper, the most brilliant and the youngest of them all, a squat, juvenile figure, with a supercilious eye-glass in the right

eye, a beak-like nose, and a habit of rasping the middle of his seat with his hands, like an owl on a perch. Matt was dying to talk to them—and especially to Cornpepper—of their art; as to men who had already done something in the world through which they moved, burdened with aspirations and haloed with dreams. But the talk would not veer round to painting, and the evening was entirely devoted to a general game of shell-out with halfpenny points. Matt was drawn into taking a cue, and lost one and threepence halfpenny in the first game, his inexperience being aggravated by Herbert's whispered caution not to cut the cloth. However, his skilled eye and hand, practised with gun and brush, soon told, and he won his money back in the second, much to his relief, for his funds were running away at an appalling rate. The strenuous leaders of the newest art movement relaxed over the green table, highly hilarious as the white ball ran among the red balls like a sheep-dog, to drive them into the pockets, and stamping and contorting themselves in mock applause after a failure to score.

"That's a fluke!" Herbert would say when the failure was his, and the jest became a catchword provocative of perpetual cachinnation.

There were so many hands in the game that Matt had plenty of time for occasional remarks between his turns, but nobody would speak of art except a venerable graybeard named Brinkside, who talked to him enthusiastically of the Azure Art campaign. He told him of the heroism of its leaders: of how Cornpepper had lived on dates and water while doing black-and-white illustrations for the *Christian Home*, salvation subjects at starvation prices; of how the even sturdier Butler had slept in a stable-loft, refusing to compromise with his genius or to modify the great dabs of paint that the world mistook for daubs. In answer to Matt's inquiries, the old man explained to him how Cornpepper painted his night scenes, by putting down at fever heat in the morning some beautiful effect noted and absorbed the night before. In the evening Cornpepper would return to the spot, Brinkside said; but if, despite all his waiting, he could not see the same effect, he would wilfully forget the second impression, and return again and again till the

first conditions were repeated. Matt, relieved to find that Cornpepper's method was similar to his own, and that genius had no esoteric prerogatives of method, pointed out that in Nature's infinite permutations an effect never recurred exactly as before, and that, therefore, he, for his part, contented himself with storing up in his mind the main values and color-planes, relying on deduction for the minutiæ. But, of course, it all depended on holding the total effect, the original sensation, vividly in the memory. On leaving he thanked Brinkside with touching humility for the instructive interest of his conversation.

"Funny to find an old man in a new movement," he observed, suddenly, to Herbert, in their homeward hansom.

"Why not? Old men often creep in. It's their last chance. But if it's Brinkside you're thinking of, he's not an artist at all. He's an artists' colorman, who supplied 'em with their materials on tick before they caught on. Brinkside's like a dress-maker I used to know at Brighton, who financed lovely woman till she married wealthy flats. He foresaw they would get on, and, by Jove, they *are* blazing away like a house on fire, or, perhaps I ought to say, like a chimney on fire."

"Then the opposition to the Academy is flourishing!" cried Matt, joyfully. His vague, youthful sympathy with all that was fresh and young was strengthened and made concrete by the revelations of struggle and starvation in the lives of those that had preceded him, martyred for the faith that was in them.

"Yes, it is flourishing," said Herbert; "so much so that in ten years' time most of 'em will be Academicians or Associates. If I were the governor I'd buy 'em up now; but he's got no insight."

"Oh," said Matt, disappointed. "Do you mean the Academy will win, after all?"

"Six of one and half a dozen of t'other. They'll be half accepted and half toned down. Already Greme and Butler are married—and that's the beginning of the end. Lucky beggars! supplied with enthusiasm in their youth, and comfort in their old age. I wish I was young myself."

"What nonsense!"

"I never was young," said Herbert, shaking his head. "I always saw through everything. Heigho! Give us a light from your cigar. I've sighed mine out."

"I suppose they're very grateful to Brinkside," said Matt, when the fire of Herbert's cigar was rekindled.

"They play billiards with him, but I don't suppose they've squared up yet."

"But they're making money now," urged Matt, horrified. Years of bitter slavery to domestic liabilities had unfitted him to understand this laxity of financial fibre.

"And then? Why be rash? One can't foresee the future."

Before the magnificence of this rebuke Matt shrank abashed; he had a sneaking twinge of shame and concern for his own homely honesty, as for something inauspiciously inartistic.

"Talking of money," went on Herbert, "I'm devilish hard up myself for a day or two — bills to meet at once, and my allowance don't come due for a few days. You couldn't advance me a trifle, I suppose?"

"Of course I could," said Matt, eagerly.

"Do you think you could let me have a pony?"

"A pony?" repeated Matt, mystified.

"Twenty-five pounds. Don't do it if it will at all inconvenience you."

Matt was glad that it was too dark for Herbert to read his face. The sum was by far the greater portion of his worldly possessions. But he did not hesitate. Herbert would refund it in a day or two.

"I will bring it to the studio to-morrow," he said.

"That's a good chap," said Herbert. "By-the-way, we've got to go to Cornpepper's studio next Sunday week."

"Really?" cried Matt, in delighted excitement.

"Yes; he told me he didn't like to ask you direct, because you looked so serious and strait-laced."

"Oh!" protested Matt, with a vague sense of insult.

"Well, you do, there's no denying it. Remember how you preached to me about the governor the first time you saw me. Perhaps you'll go lecturing Cornpepper because he economizes by domesticating his model when he has a big picture on the

easel. Personally, I like Cornpepper; he is the only fellow who has the courage of his want of principles in this white-washed sepulchre of a country. But be careful that you don't talk to him as you did to Rapper, for he lives up to his name. He is awfully peppery when you tread on his corns, though he has no objection to stamping on yours. Not that I believe there's any real malice in him, but they say his master at the Beaux-Arts was a very quarrelsome fellow, and my opinion is that he models himself on him, and thinks that to quarrel with everybody is to be a great artist."

"Oh, but don't you think he *will* be a great artist?" said Matt.

"He *is* a great artist, but he won't be," said Herbert. "He'll be an R.A. By Jove! we nearly ran over that Guardsman. Mary Ann has been standing him too many drinks. Do you know the price of a Guardsman, Matt?"

"The price?"

"Yes; a nurse-maid who wishes to be seen walking out with a swagger soldier has to give him half a crown and his beer."

Herbert never lost an opportunity of showing off to Matt his knowledge of the inner working of the great social machine. Madame, passing her white hand lovingly over her boy's hair, had no idea of the serpentine wisdom garnered in the brain beneath.

At the Marble Arch, Matt, carefully bearing the photograph of Rapper's "Library," got out of the hansom to exchange to a 'bus which passed near his street. He offered to pay his share of the hansom, but Herbert waved the silver aside with princely magnificence.

CHAPTER V

A SYMPOSIUM

MATT'S desire to hear the brotherhood of the brush on Art was gratified *ad nauseam* at Cornpepper's, for a batch of artists of all ages, together with a couple of journalists, assembled in the big, bare, picture-littered studio to smoke their own pipes

and to say "when" to the neat-handed model who dispensed the host's whiskey. Some declared they wanted it neat, to take off the effects of a grewsome tale with which Rapper had started the evening. It was about the time when he had studied art in Berlin and attended Ringschneider's anatomy class. ("I'm not much of an artist, but I do know anatomy," he interpolated.) One day when the corpse upon which the professor was about to demonstrate was uncovered, the students recognized, to their horror, a favorite fellow-pupil, who had been away for a few days. He had been taken ill in his garret, conveyed to the hospital, and, being alone in the world, had been sold to the lecture-room. The startled class immediately subscribed for another corpse, and buried the unfortunate boy with due honors. Greme tried to counteract this tale by another one about a model, an old fellow named William Tell, who, after vainly applying at the Slade and Lambeth schools for work, had been taken up by the St. George's Sketching Club for the sake of his picturesque corded breeches. When, at the end of the two hours' spell, the men were criticising one another's work, one said to another, "There doesn't seem any leg under those breeches." Overhearing which, William Tell fell to indignantly unbuttoning his gaiters.

The arrival of a twinkling-eyed caricaturist, joyously greeted by all as "Jimmy," dispelled the last flavors of the mortuary. "Aren't you in China?" everybody asked. Jimmy explained he had thrown up the commission, but was off to the West Indies next month, though he expected to find himself in Paris instead. He was a genius, with an infinite capacity for taking pains and making friends, and, being forced to rise in the small hours to get through his work before the countless callers arrived to distract him, was popularly supposed to be an idle scapegrace, who produced sketches as rapidly and copiously as the conjurer produces oranges from his coat-sleeve. Matt's breath was almost taken away in a rush of reverence and rapture at the unexpected privilege of seeing him; for, despite his own craving for the Sublime and the Beautiful, Jimmy Raven's sketches of low London life had for him a magnetic appeal whose strength surprised himself. Sometimes he fancied it

was the humor and the fun that held him, as being the qualities in which he himself was most deficient; sometimes it flashed upon him obscurely—as in a light thrown through a fog—that Jimmy Raven was teaching him to see the spectacle of life more deeply and truthfully through the medium of his humorous vision; at such instants he almost thought one of Jimmy's loafers worth a whole Academy of poetic myths, but he suppressed the suspicion as absurd and perturbing to his own ideals and vision, telling himself it was only the truth and subtlety of the draughtsmanship that he admired. He listened to him now as eagerly and deferentially as to Cornpepper, his eyes fixed mainly on these two famous faces, as if to seize the secret of their gifts in some contour of nose or chin; but he had ample curiosity and respect to spend even on the other men, though below all his real modesty and diffidence was a curious bed-rock of self-conscious strength, as of a talent that might hope one day to be recognized even of these.

But there was little art-talk to be got out of Jimmy. Having likewise said "when," he launched into an account of an East End girl he had sketched that morning in the Park, and quoted her idea of a coster gentleman. "My brother's a toff," he had overheard her boasting. "He wears three rows of buttons down his trousers, and sixteen wentilation 'oles in 'is 'at." "And who do you think I saw in the Park?" he went on. "Egyptian Bill."

"No?" cried various voices. "What was he preaching?"

"Buddhism," said Jimmy. "He's sitting to Winkelman, that old chap who became a Buddhist when he was painting those Eastern things the critics made such a fuss about."

There was a laugh at the expense of the Mohammedan model, who always suited his religion to his employer's.

"When I did him," said Jimmy, "I pretended to be a Jew, and it was great fun after he became a Jew to tell him I was a Christian. . . . I don't know which was the biggest lie," he added, with his droll twinkle.

"Did you hear about the Hindoo who went to see Winkelman's things at Dowdeswell's?" said Butler. "He spat out. You see, he knew the real thing." He smiled with grim satis-

faction, for the things were licked and stippled into a meretricious poetry, and his own bold blobs of Oriental color had been laughed at.

"Don't you wish they supplied spittoons at the Academy?" asked Jimmy.

It was the red rag. For the next ten minutes the absurdities of the Academy and the transcendent merits of the Salon (which most of them had run over to Paris to see) occupied the tapis, and then a spectacled Scotchman, who answered to the name of Mack, dilated upon the decadence of the grisette and the degeneracy of the students' orgies.

"Ah, but still Paris stands for the joy of life," said Corn-pepper. "They are not ashamed of living."

"They ought to be," said Matt, and the company laughed, as at a good joke.

"Our young friend thinks the artist should be moral," said Herbert, paternally.

"He'll say art should be moral next," said Mack.

"It isn't immoral, is it?" said Matt, feebly. As usual, he was half fascinated, half shocked by the freedom of the artistic standpoint, for which his intellect was ready, but not his deeper organization. He wondered again why he was so uncomfortably constructed, and he envied these others for whom their art seemed to flow in happy irrelation to conduct and character, or at least to the moral ideals of the bourgeois. He marvelled at them, too, not understanding how talents more subconscious than his own could lie in closed compartments, as it were, of the artists' minds, apparently unaffected by the experiences of their temporary owners.

"Art's neither moral nor immoral," pronounced the little host, magisterially, as he grasped his perch more tightly, "any more than it's lunar or calendar. The artist thinks and feels in line and color. He sees Nature green or gray, according to his temperament. There are as many views from Richmond Hill as there are artists. If two views are alike, one is a plagiarism. Nature will never be exhausted, for every man sees her differently."

"And so long as he doesn't see her double—" put in Jimmy.

"Quite so," said Cornpepper. "So long as he isn't too drunk to keep his brush steady, we ask no more of him. In fact, it's always best to be in love with your sitter—that's what gives *chic*."

"Rot!" said a granite-faced, white-bearded septuagenarian who had been smoking in silent amusement. "*Chic* comes merely from painting with brushes too large for the work."

"Avast there, Rocks!" said Jimmy. "We don't want any of your revolutionary notions here. What would you say if we denounced jammy shadows at the Academy dinner?"

"Avast yourself!" cried Cornpepper, rather angrily. "This is Liberty Hall. I won't be classed with the new school, or with any school." Cornpepper's success had already made him feel the dead-weight of an extravagant school with which one is confounded. "Because I exhibit with you chaps, people credit me with all your views. You might as well say I agree with the president because I'm on the line in the Academy."

"Have you got a picture in the Academy, Teddy? I didn't notice it," said Wilfred Smith, the journalist, thereby expressing what was in Matt's mind too.

"There you are!" laughed Rocks. "When you come among us you're lost. It's only by our rejecting you that we make you famous. When you exhibit by yourselves, you stand out."

"I allow Rocks to talk," said little Cornpepper, with a good-natured smile. "He was the first to detect my talent, and I am really sorry to be the last to detect his. I think his big nudes are shocking. He and Tarmigan are a pair. Where is the point of painting heathen mythology?"

"I only paint the nude because I can't paint clothes," said Rocks, smiling. "You are all so versatile nowadays."

"Ah, Teddy 'll come round to the classic, too, one day," said Butler, with a weary expression on his strong, stern face. "You should have seen his joy when he got the invitation for varnishing-day."

"Nothing of the sort," cried little Cornpepper, glaring through his eye-glass and humping himself into a more owl-like curve. "I didn't even accept the invitation. I wasn't going to help the R.A.'s to correct their draughtsmanship."

The glare relaxed under his pleasure at the laugh, and he added, more quietly: "Do let us drop shop, for Heaven's sake. I'm not one of a school—I'm myself. And I don't say salvation lies with any sect. Give me style; that's all I ask for."

"Will you have it neat?" murmured Jimmy.

"Style, not school," pursued Cornpepper, pleased with the phrase. "Take literature! There's style in Boccaccio, and style in Flaubert, and style in Wycherley. Even a moral work may pass if it has style—Pope's satires, for instance. So, too, in painting. I don't find style in Bouguereau or Fred Walker, in Rocks or Tarmigan, who are only fit for chromos, but I do find it in Mantegna, in Fortuny, in Degas, in—"

"Good-bye!" said Jimmy, getting up. "I have to meet my wife at ten."

"Oh, there's lots of time," said Cornpepper. "Carrie, pass Jimmy the whiskey. Sit down, there's a good chap." And Jimmy sat down.

"Style's going to be a square touch and a feathery outline," said Greme, sarcastically.

"Style's merely a decorative appearance," said Mack. "A picture is primarily a wall-decoration; it has no right to exist for itself."

"Hear, hear!" cried Herbert. Mack lived up to his principles, for he always saw Nature as a pretty pattern.

"Style's an accident; look at the blottesque effects you get in water-color," said Rocks.

"The last and greatest art—the art to blot," quoted Levison, the second journalist, who also posed as a war-artist in times of peace.

"When I was in Antwerp, under Villat," said Rapper—"a fierce little man he was—he used to come and correct our canvases with big blotches of burnt sienna and lamp-black on the last day of a model. Rocks would call that a blottesque effect. Now I flatter myself *I* can tell you what style is, though I don't profess to get it myself. Style is—"

"The art of leaving in—or leaving out—accidents," finished Rocks. "You see that so well in Fortuny's work."

"Jimmy gets his effects by leaving out all the dead lines of

his first sketch," said Wilfred Smith, the journalist; "don't you, Jimmy?"

"So I'm told," said Jimmy.

"Style *is* the art of leaving out," said Herbert. "They don't leave out the R.A.'s pictures in the Academy. Hence the absence of style in the show."

"Tut, tut, tut! Shop again!" cried Cornpepper, despairingly. "The only chance of progress for art is in neglecting values—not from ignorance, like the Germans, but from intention; not viewing Nature through a bit of black glass, like Millet, or toning down the violets of her shadows, but painting real sunlight."

"But you can't really paint sunlight," put in Matt, timidly. "Paint's only mud."

"Quite so," said Cornpepper. "But Delacroix said, 'Give me mud, and I'll paint you the skin of Venus.' It depends on what you put round your mud."

"Or how you put it on," added Gurney. "The only way is to get optics to help you, and mix your primaries on the canvas, not on the palette, with a Bright's brush."

"I reckon you'll be breaking out in 'spots' next," laughed Rocks. "That *Vibriste* nonsense has been the ruin of young Dircks. He used to be quite second-rate, but since he crossed the Channel he squeezes his tubes on to his canvas, and it's all streaks like a clown's face."

"Paint is neither mud nor sunlight," interposed Butler, authoritatively. "It's paint. Glory in it. Don't pretend it's silk or wood. According to the Academy, the highest art is to conceal paint."

"Shop again!" groaned Cornpepper. "We're an awfully narrow set, we artists—always girding at each other's methods, though we're all trying for the same thing." Then, recalled by Butler's frowning face to a sense of his position as *chef d'école*, a position he was not yet prepared to abdicate, he added, in more conciliatory accents: "All I object to in the Academy is its existence. No body of men has the right to say to the public, *L'art, c'est moi.* I don't for a moment claim our work's better than theirs, only—"

"That theirs is worse than ours," suggested Jimmy.

"It's all very well, but their ideal is smooth things," persisted Butler, vehemently. "Smooth things in paint, in life, and in after-dinner speeches. I should have taken the Gold Medal in my year, and been spared years of grinding misery, if I had scraped out the life with a fish-shell or a razor-blade."

Matt's eyes flashed sympathetic admiration at him.

"Bother the Academy!" said Herbert, hastily. "Pass me the jug."

"Schools of Arts are barracks," went on Butler, his resentment unexhausted. "They would fuse all talents in one mould, and put together what God has put asunder. You may teach craft; but Art—never!"

"The idea of setting a subject, too," said Greme, who was very proud of his private color-vision. "They go on a false analogy. Art can't be got at by a competitive examination. It isn't like Latin or Greek, or the use of the globes; it's the expression of individual temperament. And it's always such a rotten, stilted subject they set for the Gold Medal. I wonder what it is this year?"

"Strang's at the Academy," said Rapper. "He'll tell you."

"Oh, confound the Academy!" said Herbert, crossly.

"Something Biblical, you bet your boots," said Jimmy. "It makes the fellows read the Bible, anyhow. But I must really go and meet my wife."

"I heard it was about Nebu—" Greme began.

"Here, shut up, Greme!" interrupted Herbert. "Isn't it time to sing songs?"

He glanced anxiously at his cousin; but that enthusiastic young man was gazing at Butler with a hypnotized stare, lost in an inward vision of the youthful rebel painting in his stable-loft.

"It's time to drop shop," responded Cornpepper, sharply. "I've been trying to get the talk off art for the last half-hour. I want to discuss whiskey, woman, and song. What's the difference who wins the Gold Medal, or even the Prix de Rome? That's the last one ever hears of them."

"Oh no," said Rapper; "all the professors at the Beaux-Arts took the Prix de Rome."

"Did the men with guts?" inquired Cornpepper, scathingly, as he glared through his monocle at his contradictor. "Did the biggest of all, Puvis de Chavannes? Now, you fellows define style, but it never occurs to you that it is simply the perfect handling of your medium, whatever it be. What makes the decorations of Puvis de Chavannes so great? Merely that the gray, cool color scheme just suits the stone of the Pantheon. The decorations of Laurens would be finer as easel pictures. They make the building look smaller. Those of Chavannes ennoble it, give the sense of space and atmosphere. The medium forced to yield its best—that is style. There is one glory of silver-point and another of chalk or pencil. Fritz's pictures are damn bad because they are in the wrong medium. To preserve a chronicle of the time is the function of black and white. Only by—"

"I really must go," said Jimmy, starting up again. "As a black-and-white man I preserve a chronicle of the time, and it tells me it's a quarter-past ten, and I have got to meet my wife at the Monico at ten."

"Oh, rot! There's lots of time." And a dozen hands pushed Jimmy into his seat, and Carrie brought him more whiskey.

"I never could see how you square that with your principles, Cornpepper," argued Gurney, the gyrator, with a thoughtful wrinkle of his elderly face. "Every painter's got to do his own time. Posterity won't want Erle-Smith's Greek gods with ginger-bread flesh, and sickly sea-nymphs with wooden limbs. A cod's head, well painted, is better than a Madonna." Erle-Smith had been his last idolized Master before he came to worship at the shrine of Cornpepper.

"But there's imagination in Erle-Smith," Matt protested, deferentially.

Gurney snorted out quintessence of contempt in an indecorous monosyllable. "'Bus-drivers and ballet-girls — that's the modern artist's duty to posterity. And his duty to his contemporaries is to find the poetry and beauty around 'em and teach 'em to see it. That's why your 'Chimney on Fire in Fitzroy Street' is the picture of the year."

"Oh yes!" Matt burst forth, in the idiom of Granger's, "it's jolly stunning!"

Cornpepper made a *moue* of disgust. "Are we never going to get away from shop?" he asked, desperately. "What has my chimney to do with the chronicles of the time? You chaps have always misunderstood me. You all go by what O'Brien writes of me in the *Saturday Spectator*. I do wish he wouldn't interpret me. I wish he'd leave me alone. It's bad enough to have the papers writing about one's sayings and doings, it's bad enough to be afraid of your own friends when, like Levison and Wilfred Smith, they happen to be journalists; but to be interpreted in leading articles by O'Brien is the crowning blow. What right has he to meddle with art? Why the hell doesn't he stick to his last? If I painted that chimney—"

"Instead of sweeping it," murmured Jimmy. "Do let me go and meet my wife."

"—it was because I saw an opportunity for style, and for giving an epic sense of London," little Cornpepper went on, fixing Jimmy with his basilisk glare. "I don't care a twopenny damn about posterity or my contemporaries. I paint as I do everything else—to please myself."

"We know you don't please anybody else," retorted Jimmy. "I *must* be off."

"Well, black and white is going to be the art of the future, anyhow," said Butler. "Art is dead in England. Nobody disputes that."

"Of course not," said Cornpepper. "Painting's a lost art. Not one of us can touch the old men—Watts, Millais, Whistler. No; we none of us can paint."

"But English art 'll revive through black and white," Butler maintained. "It's the art of the people. I wish I had discovered that in the days when I refused to do it."

"Black and white is not the art of the future, but the future of Art," said Herbert. "Nothing else pays."

"It's surer than anything else," admitted Gurney. "And a paper gives you a far wider appeal than a gallery. It's the only way of elevating the people." His eye lit up. He was meditating a new departure.

Matt pricked up his ears; Herbert had not yet repaid him the twenty-five pounds, borrowed for a day or two, and in any case he felt he must soon be earning money. In the stagnation of the picture market, of which he heard on every side, and on which the talk fell now, it was at once comforting and distressing to hear of another source of income. Black and white had scarcely entered into his thoughts before; he looked upon it as a degraded commercial form of art—a thing manufactured for the moment in obedience to editorial instructions. Perhaps if times had changed, if editors allowed the artist to express himself through their pages, one might think of it; otherwise it was too horrible. Art to order! The spirit whose essence was freedom chained to a cash-box! It were as well—and honester—to be a cobbler like William Gregson. He shuddered violently, remembering his sufferings as a portrait-painter in Nova Scotia, and very resolved to starve sooner than repeat those degrading efforts to please customers.

"I don't talk about it," said Cornpepper, after ten minutes of general tragic anecdotage, from which he gathered there was quite a rush into black and white—a subject concerning which both the journalists seemed fully posted. "I just go on working; I don't care whether I sell or not. The dealers I hate and despise; they have no measure of Art but what it 'll fetch. I will have nothing to do with them. The world will come to me sooner or later. You never hear *me* grumbling about the market."

"The more I hear of the troubles of you chaps," said Rapper, "the more surprised I am that I, with nothing like your talents, should be the one to get the commissions, as if I had any need of the shiners. I'm going to Birmingham again next week to do a municipal duffer in his robes. Even when I studied art in Brussels—"

"The real reason we're coming to black and white," broke in the spectacled Scotchman, "is that we're all born color-blind. The dulness of our surroundings, the long centuries of homes without decorations, with unbeautiful furniture and crockery, have told, and now—"

There was a roar of laughter. "Stow that, Mack!" cried Rapper.

"You can't keep Mack off shop," cried Cornpepper. "I'm sick of this talk about principles. Art, life, nature, realism, the decorative! The decorative indeed! For what is Art? It isn't studio-pictures, it's—"

"It's half-past ten," groaned Jimmy, trying to shake off the detaining hands of his friends. "Where's Sandstone? Why hasn't he turned up? He goes my way."

"I don't know," said Cornpepper. "He's been quarrelling with the man who published his lithographs. What a quarrelsome beggar he is! I believe he's quarrelled with Clinch now. By-the-way, where *is* Clinch? He said he was coming."

Everybody supposed simultaneously that Clinch was drunk, and their light-hearted acceptance of the idea jarred upon Matt, who again became conscious of a curious aloofness from the company, from which he seemed as cut off on the moral side as from the despised bourgeoisie on the artistic side. What a strange isolation! The thought made him feel lonely, and then—by reaction—strong.

Even Rocks laughed. "I prefer Philip drunk to Philip sober," he said. "It's the only time he uses drawing-room English."

"How can I sup with my wife at the Monico?" persisted Jimmy, plaintively. "The beastly place closes at eleven on Sundays."

"Oh, the English Sunday!" said Herbert. "How can you have art and the English Sunday together? You talk of the art of the people, Curtis. The real national art of England is oratorio, and Elijah may not appear on the stage except in evening dress."

"Don't talk to me of the middle classes," groaned Cornpepper. "They will never be saved till Boccaccio is read aloud in every parlor on Sunday afternoons."

"Don't be an ass, Teddy," said Butler. "You'll be moral some day."

"I can get my stockings darned without marrying," retorted Cornpepper, with an irritating laugh, and Butler reddened angrily. He had married a slipshod, artistic creature who neglected his shirt-buttons, and the thrust rankled.

"*My* wife's waiting at the Monico," complained Jimmy, in a droll sing-song.

"Oh, bother! Carrie's just making the coffee," replied the host.

"I won't have coffee," said Jimmy; "I never mix drinks."

The coffee came round, and with it sandwiches, and broke up the talk into duets and trios. Cornpepper planned a house-boat party for the summer to pick up nautical models and paint the river. Matt's envious consciousness that he was too poor and too obscure to share in these delightful artistic experiences gave him a new and more disagreeable sense of aloofness. Then the proceedings became musical and remained so till the next morning, their refusal to depart before the advent of which the guests melodiously declared.

As the party was breaking up, Cornpepper cried: "Oh, I was nearly forgetting."

"What?" said Jimmy. "To offer a prayer?"

"No, to take up a collection," retorted Cornpepper, his eye-glass gleaming with joy of the *mot*. "Lily's broken her leg."

"*Our* Lily?" asked Greme. "But she doesn't sit now—she's on the stage."

"I know; she's dislocated her ankle, and can't dance."

"She never could dance," observed Herbert. "How ever did she get an engagement?"

"Browney put her into his types of English beauty," replied Cornpepper. "But she's a good girl all the same, and she hasn't got any money. I'll lead off with five bob."

In a few minutes two guineas were collected, Matt giving half a crown, which he could ill spare. As the men left, Cornpepper stood at the door exchanging a confidential word with each. "By Jove, you didn't say a word during the whole discussion, Mossop," he said, as he shook hands with a brown-bearded, middle-aged Scotchman, whose cranium bulged curiously at the side.

Mossop took his pipe out of his mouth and looked meditatively at the stem. "If art could be talked, it wouldn't want to be painted," he said, gravely. "Good-night."

"Good-night, old chap. Ah, good-night, Wilfred!" said Cornpepper to the journalist. "Understand, this evening is private. I don't object to your quoting what I or anybody else said—my opinions are common property—but, damn it, if you mention who were here in any of your papers you'll never cross my door-step again. You don't mind my frankness? Good-night, old man."

"Good-night, Cornpepper," said Herbert. "I'll let the governor know about those things of yours," he added, in a low tone.

"That's a good fellow. He won't regret taking me up. Mind you mention I'm not unreasonable—I'm open to an offer. I'm awfully glad to have made your acquaintance. Good-night, old chap. Ah, good-night, Levison!" he said, shaking hands with the other journalist. "Now, please do understand that what passes at my gatherings is strictly confidential. If you can earn half a dollar by mentioning who were here—Rocks is rather a lion just now—I'm not the man to stand in your light. But I won't have what one says in private reported, and that's straight. Good-night, old fellow."

Two o'clock boomed from a neighboring steeple. "Good-night, Teddy," said Jimmy, the last man to go. He added, lugubriously: "I've *still* got to meet my wife." Then, as he caught sight of himself in the hall-rack mirror, the gleam in his eye grew droller. "I'm going home in my own hat and coat," he grumbled. "I'm sober."

It was delicious to breathe the balmy night air after the smoky, alcoholic atmosphere of the studio. Rocks walked a little way with Herbert and Matt under the silent stars before they came upon a hansom.

"Are you also an artist?" he asked Matt.

"I hope to be," said Matt, gravely, "but it's awfully confusing to know what's right. They all talk so cleverly, and they all seem to be right." He was still worried about formulæ, not having discovered that there are only men.

Rocks emitted a short laugh. "Don't you bother your head with theories, my boy," he said, laying his hand kindly on Matt's shoulder. "You just paint. Every man does what he

can, and runs down what he can't. After all, Art is very old; there are no great sensational reforms left, like West's discarding the toga for the clothes of the period. The *plein air* school is this century's contribution; after that there can only be permutations and combinations of the old. What is new in the Azure Art Gallery is not good, and what is good is not new."

"*C'est fini!*" said Herbert. "That's what people always say till genius comes along. My belief is, going by literature and music, that painting hasn't said its last word."

"It may come back to its first," admitted Rocks, laughing. "Things go in cycles. At present the last word of Art is azure."

"But there *are* azure shadows?" said Matt.

"Yes; sunshine on a yellow sand gives a suspicion of blue and violet where the yellow light is cut off. But you exaggerate it and call that a revolution."

"Yes, but this intensified violet, made on your canvas out of light pigments, does produce the illusion of sunlight," argued Matt. "And, to my mind, it doesn't falsify nature or values one bit, because in bright sunlight the eye really sees the dazzle, not the values."

"Perhaps you young men see the new ultra-shades at the end of the spectrum," said Rocks, a little annoyed to find Matt restive under his patronizing geniality. "Apelles had only four colors, but his reputation has survived. It is the craze for novelty that makes these fads catch on."

"On the contrary," retorted Matt, hotly, "people are so accustomed to the false they have no eyes for the true. It's the old fable of the man with the pig under his cloak. I read somewhere that in Sir Joshua's day it was the convention to paint portraits with hats under their arm, and that Sir Joshua, having to paint a man with his hat on, automatically put a second hat under his arm. If he hadn't found it out, I don't believe the public would have. And weren't the 1830 men laughed at in France, though now they're thrown in the teeth of the Impressionists? It's always the same tale—the revolutionary is always wrong till he's right. Treason never prospers. What's the reason? When 'tis successful, 'tis no

longer treason.' Truth and light—that's the right formula of landscape-painting."

Herbert laughed. "My stars, Matt!" he cried, gayly, "that's the longest speech I've ever heard you make! Is Cornpepper's whiskey so much better than mine?"

It was, perhaps, not so much the whiskey as the reaction after the long, respectful self-repression of the evening. But Rocks caught fire in his turn.

"Revolution!" he cried, scornfully. "Doing things literally by halves — *there's* a revolution, *there's* a revelation for you. The new art! If the modern young man can't draw, color's the thing; and if he's got no sense of color, color is vulgar. And even if he doesn't offend my sense of line by figures that couldn't stand and limbs that don't fit on he won't finish his work. He leaves it half-cooked to show his *chic;* to take it further would be Academic. It's mere notes for pictures, not pictures. And even at that half the ideas come from Paris, like our ladies' gowns; if you ran over there as often as I do you could put your finger on most of these azure fellows' inspirations. If they would only search like the French! If they would only really imitate their Monet! That's a real worker for you—how he slaves at his hay-stacks! More science than art to my thinking; but how he searches! These chaps are such dwarfs. Think of Leonardo, think of Raphael, think of Millet—real men, with big brains and big souls. No; this Azure Art Club's a set of bounders and bad draughtsmen. There's too much mutual admiration; it prevents men getting on; they'll find themselves stranded with a half-talent."

"And hasn't Butler got a big soul?" cried Matt, boiling over. "And hasn't Cornpepper got a big brain?"

"Cornpepper?—oh, but this is shop again. He's a good little chap at bottom, but he's succeeding too young." And in Rocks's hearty guffaw the storm-clouds rolled away.

"You mustn't fancy I agree with him altogether, Mr. Rocks," said Matt, simmering down in his turn. "About the morality of Art, now, isn't there—"

"Ah, there's the Methodist parson again," interrupted Herbert, laughing. "Hang it all, man, you're not a virgin, are you?"

"No, of course not," faltered Matt, mendaciously. He went on in haste: "*There's* a cab!"

"No, I hate four-wheelers!" said Herbert. "Then why the devil do you always talk such rot? Hansom!"

"They don't seem as united as the papers make out, anyway," said Matt, in shame-faced evasion. He was ashamed of the lie, and ashamed of its not being true.

"No, there's no *esprit de corps* among artists," returned Rocks. "People always imagine there are schools. But in London there's only the camaraderie of success and the camaraderie of unsuccess. Good-night."

"Can't we give you a lift?" said Herbert.

"No, thanks; I'm successful," rejoined Rocks, and went off chuckling.

"I wish *I* was," Herbert grumbled to Matt. "Fancy not being able to join that house-boat party, but to be stuck down in town by the Old Gentleman to paint Nebuchadnezzar. I wish I was you, Matt."

Matt was on the point of consoling him by confessing he was on the brink of ruin, but that would have seemed like dunning a friend, to whom he owed so much, for the twenty-five pounds, so he postponed the inevitable explanation.

CHAPTER VI

THE OUTCAST

It was midsummer, and everybody who was anybody was pent in the sweltering city.

"The sort of weather to make one want to be a figure-model," Herbert said, wearily, as he flicked finically at "Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar," now well on its way to completion. "But it seems to suit the Old Gentleman. You might laugh, Matt. I'm too languid myself."

Matt did not reply; he was leaning against the marble mantel-piece, pale and perspiring.

"What do you think is his latest move?" pursued Herbert. "Though that's rather a bull, for the mischief is that he refuses to go on our annual autumn jaunt abroad, lest it should interfere with Daniél and Nebby. However, I am to have a horse of my own, and that's some consolation. Talking of horses, how do you like Nebby's left leg? You see I've repainted it as you marked it." He got up, walked backward, and surveyed the picture approvingly, brush in hand. "By Jove, it's coming on splendidly! I could imagine I was in the palace. There *is* something in following Nature, after all. The creative part lies in the invention and color. . . . What's the matter with you this morning, Matt? You don't say a word. Are you sunstruck? or moonstruck?"

"Both," said Matt, with a ghastly smile.

"Why, what's up?" Herbert scrutinized his cousin's face for the first time.

Matt looked towards the model.

"You know his English is limited," Herbert remarked, reassuringly. "Unless you are bent on talking Arabic." But Matt still hesitated. At last, as in desperation, he extracted a letter from his breast-pocket and tendered it to Herbert, who took it wonderingly, cast a glance at it, and frowned.

"The scoundrel!" he said. "How dare he send it in so soon? I shall never recommend him to anybody again."

"It isn't soon," corrected Matt; "it's more than three months."

"You're not going to take any notice of him yet?"

"Oh, I must."

"Oh, nonsense! Why, the shock would drive him silly. He only sends it in as a matter of form."

"I don't like not to pay."

"All right," said Herbert, sulkily; "only you'll spoil the market for us poor devils who're not Crœsuses, that's all. But don't give him the fifteen guineas at once; give him five on account."

Matt struggled with himself. "I can't even do that," he faltered at last, "unless you can manage to pay me something."

"Oh, by Jove!" said Herbert, whistling lugubriously. "I'd forgotten you were among my creditors. But I'm stony-broke just now. So the old scoundrel will have to wait, after all. Ha! ha! ha! When do you expect to be flush again? I suppose you draw interest on bonds or something. All Americans do."

"I—I don't," said Matt, his head drooping shame-stricken. Then, with the courage of despair, he burst out, "I've only got tenpence in the world; that's a fact."

Herbert gave a shrill whistle of surprise and dismay, and let himself drop upon his painting-stool. "Here, go and play a little, Haroun al Raschid," he called over to the model; and Nebuchadnezzar, shedding his purpureal splendors, cantered joyously down-stairs.

"Now then," he said, sternly. "What in the devil have you been up to, my Methodist parson? Gambling, horse-racing, women?"

Matt shook his head, a wan smile struggling with his shame-faced expression. He already felt happier—the false atmosphere in which he had moved was dissipated forever. "I've never had any money to lose," he confessed. "I only saved up fifty or sixty pounds to study in London for a year, and now it's all gone—unless you can manage to repay me the twenty-five pounds."

"Well, of all the—" cried Herbert, and did not finish the mysterious phrase. He leaned his elbows on his knees, and supporting his face upon his palms, stared severely at his cousin. "So this is the man who thinks Art should be moral," he said, half musingly, half indignantly. "To go and let us all think you were a capitalist! And to let me in for borrowing money of a man who was practically a pauper! Why, I must have taken almost your last penny!"

Matt, flushing afresh under his reproachful gaze, did not attempt to deny it.

"Well, if that's your idea of cousinly behavior, or even decent behavior—" said Herbert, witheringly.

"I—I didn't mean to deceive you," Matt stammered, apologetically. "You all took it for granted I was well-to-do. All

I said was I had money enough to go along with, and so I thought I had."

"Yes, but when I asked you for the pony, you consented at once. I gave you an opportunity to explain, but instead of that you intensified the original false impression."

Matt was silent.

"And now you've put me into the wretched position of owing money, which I can't pay, to a poor relation from whom I never would have borrowed it, had he been frank and truthful."

Now both were silent, meditating the painful situation.

"Then you've got no money at all?" said Herbert at last, in stern accents, in which a note of astonishment still lingered.

Matt shook his head. His throat felt parched. "Unless you can pay me," he murmured.

Herbert's face softened, his tones became sympathetic.

"Then what are you going to do?" he asked, anxiously.

Matt was touched by the transition from reproach to solicitude.

"Oh, I shall manage somehow," he said, huskily. "I don't want to worry you—you've always been very good to me."

"Yes, that's all very well, but suppose you starve?" said Herbert, sharply.

"Oh, I shall find something to do," said Matt. "In fact, I've already done some illustrations for the *Christian Home*, though they haven't paid yet. I wouldn't have told you if it hadn't been for this tailor's bill."

"Confound him!" cried Herbert, savagely. "I'll never recommend him another customer as long as I live." He started promenading the studio angrily, muttering maledictions against the snip as the source of all the mischief.

"What a pity the governor won't touch a new man's work!" he said, pausing.

"Oh, I'd rather not trouble him," said Matt, shrinking from a supplementary explanation with the Vandyke beard.

Herbert resumed his promenade with knitted brow. "I wonder if Drücker would take them. If you did sea-pieces—"

"Oh, please don't worry," pleaded Matt, concerned at his cousin's anxiety. "I dare say I shall fall on my feet."

"Yes, but while falling? Tenpence isn't enough to fall with. You don't owe any money into the bargain, I hope."

Matt turned red. "Three weeks' rent," he murmured.

"How much is that?"

Matt shrank weakly from shredding his last rag of dignity.

"Not much," he said. "She hasn't said anything yet; I always paid her so regularly. But I don't see any reason to despair; it looks as if I can make my bread and cheese by black and white. They were all agreed that that was the most paying kind of Art. You remember that night at Cornpepper's?"

"Yes, I remember," said Herbert, curtly. "But I can't let you go away with tenpence in your pocket. I wonder if I've got anything." He drew a handful of silver and copper coins out of his trousers-pocket. "Eight and fourpence halfpenny," he announced, dolefully. "And I shall want seven for Haroun al Raschid this evening. I told you I was stony-broke. I suppose it's no use offering you one and fourpence halfpenny."

"No; then *you'd* have nothing," said Matt. "Don't bother."

"Oh, but I must bother. I wish I knew how to raise a little cash for you to keep you going till you get work."

The grave anxiety of his tones troubled Matt sympathetically. He was pained to see Herbert so distressed. Suddenly his eyes fell on Herbert's battalion of boots ranged against the wall—brown boots, black boots, patent boots, riding boots, shoes, slippers—and a wild, impish idea flew into his brain, breathing malicious suggestion, and even kindling a flash of resentment: "Why should not Herbert sell some of those serried boots if he was really in earnest?" But the impish idea was extruded in a moment. It savored of ungenerous cynicism, and, in so far as it meditated diminishing Herbert's wardrobe, touched indecency; it was impossible to imagine Herbert with only a single pair of breeches or without sub-varieties of ornamental shoes. He moved in a large atmosphere of discriminate waistcoats and superfluous neckties.

"I'll give you an introduction to Drücker, if you like," said Herbert. "I dare say you have some little things by you."

"I—I've already been to Drücker," Matt admitted. "A fel-

low at Grainger's told me about him. But he won't look at my work."

There was another embarrassing pause. Matt's eyes wandered distractedly towards Herbert's boots. The spotless battalion fascinated him; the buttons winked maliciously.

"How about portraits?" said Herbert, suddenly. "I thought you did portraits in Nova Scotia. Was that also—was that, er—true?"

Matt did not at once answer; it had suddenly occurred to him that there was probably another battalion of boots in Herbert's dressing-room. When Herbert's question at last penetrated to his consciousness, he replied with a start:

"Oh yes. Perhaps I may get sitters here, too. The only thing that really worries me is that bill."

"Oh, well, if that's all, you can make your mind easy. He can't touch you; you've no money." Herbert laughed gleefully. "It 'll serve him right, the scoundrel!"

"But he can put me in prison," said Matt, blanching at the mere idea; "and that I could never survive."

Herbert's laugh became more boisterous.

"Oh, you innocent!" he gasped. "We're not living in the dark ages. A man without a farthing is the king of creation. Nothing can touch him."

"Oh, but they put people in prison for debt in Nova Scotia," said Matt, surprised.

"Really?" ejaculated Herbert, surprised in his turn. "Well, I had no idea the country was so uncivilized as that. No, don't funk. And even suppose you *were* put into quod for debt? What then? Why, debt is the breath of the artistic nostril. Read your Bankruptcy Court daily in your paper, and cheer up, d'ye hear? Why should you take other people's worries on your shoulders?"

"Other people's?" quoth Matt, puzzled.

"Yes; the worry is for the tailor who can't get his money, not for you," explained Herbert, with the gay smile that showed his white teeth.

"I *must* pay him," Matt repeated, stolidly, and, lunch coming up, he took himself off in spite of every protest. Now that Her-

bert knew him in his true colors, his pride would not endure sitting as a pauper at the mid-day banquet, though he had eaten nothing all day except a halfpenny roll. He saw Haroun al Raschid in the street luxuriating in the sultry sunshine, and sent him up to luncheon, then dragged himself along the hot pavements to his back room, brightened now with unsaleable sketches, and threw himself upon the little iron bed, and abandoned himself to bitter reflection. Why, indeed, could he not take life as lightly as the artistic temperament demanded?

He had already tried other dealers than Drücker, with as little success. The Irishman at Grainger's was wont to boast that he always sold his work by pawning it. Matt had essayed to imitate him, speculating the outlay for a gold frame; but either his face betrayed him to the pawnbrokers, or his picture, and it eventually went for less than the price of the frame. And—O vanity of resolutions and ideals!—his horror at doing Art to order had dwindled daily. In the actual imminence of starvation, in the impossibility of sending any further subsidies to his family, he had broached to other students his desire to get on this or that paper, but could gain no sympathetic information from them, except that they had already refused the positions he coveted. On the strength of some specimens sent by post he had been permitted to illustrate five short stories for the *Christian Home*, but only two had yet been published, and none had yet been paid for. And so the dregs of his savings had dripped away, slowly, slowly, like honey from an inverted pot, more and more slowly the less there remained, till only twenty drops (for he had come down to counting in halfpennies) divided him from starvation. The arrears of rent had been an agony more gnawing than that at his stomach, and now this tailor's bill had come as the crowning catastrophe.

Yet none of his bitterness was for Herbert, despite the impish suggestions of the buttons; he did not even blame himself much. In a sense he had had value for his money, he had bought experience, if not quite of the kind for which he had saved up his dollars. But for those frightful fifteen guineas he might have weathered starvation-point, even though by the practice of a form of art he had not contemplated. To pawn

or sell the unfortunate clothes would be but to cut himself off from gentility without surmounting the crisis. His hopeless reverie was interrupted by a tap at the door, and the landlady entered, bearing a letter. He jumped up from the bed in excitement—it must be his check for the drawings. But the letter bore an American stamp, and was in Billy's writing, and he tore it open, fearful of new evils.

DEAR MATT,—I write not because there is anything fresh, but because there isn't. Life here is so dreary and monotonous I can no longer endure it. It isn't my health, for that is better, and the fits are very rare now, thank God; but sometimes I think I shall go mad or cut my throat if something doesn't happen. Don't you think I could come over and stay with you? You've seen so much of the world, and always enjoyed yourself, and I have always been tied down to one wretched little village. The people are so dismally religious, and between you and me I am losing faith in everything, the more I think of it, and how bad the good people are. Deacon Hailey and Ruth have quarrelled, and she has gone away to the States. She came to see us before she left—she is just lovely—I like to picture her before me. I should not be much extra expense, dear Matt, because you could deduct something from the amount you are soon going to send us monthly. I have mentioned this to Abner, and he is willing. I am very little use here in the fields, and in London I might perhaps earn money by writing. I feel I have it in me to write tales; I have already written one called "The Whale Hunters," and another called "In the Burning Desert." I do so long to be famous. We should be a pair, dear Matt. Do you think you could get these tales printed in a paper? I should not want money at first. I did not like to send them to you without asking, as the postage would be heavy, and the winter has been so unusually protracted we are delayed with the crops. Do please send me some books if you can; I have read everything in the school library twice over. Novels and books of travel are what I like best. The last we heard from Halifax was that mother was less violent. Do write and say I may come, and if you can let me have the fare I will repay you out of my tales. Abner and Harriet send their love, and so do all the boys and girls (Amy is getting quite podgy), and with the same from me, I remain,

Your affectionate brother, BILLY.

P.S.—Don't you think "William Strang" would look fine on the cover of a book?

Matt suddenly felt faint and dizzy. Raising his eyes, he perceived that the landlady had not gone, that she was effervescing with unuttered speech.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Lipchild," he said, "I thought that your rent would have been in this letter."

The lank, elderly woman looked grieved.

"Lor' bless you, sir," said she, "I'm not worryin' about the rent. Don't I know an honest face when I see it? Us landladies are always made out so bad. We're always stealin' the lodgers' provisions and what not, and we can't speak proper. I should like to see a book written on the other side. Why, last year I had an old maid in this very room—she took her meals here, and said I wasn't to charge for attendance because she'd be always out; but bless me if the bell didn't go tinkely-tinkely every minute, like an alarm-clock gone wrong in its inside. Believe me, Mr. Strang, it isn't the lodgers as is always taken in. I've often wished my son was a writer instead of an artist; I'd get him to write the book."

"Your son is an artist?" said Matt, in astonishment.

"Yes, Mr. Strang, though not near so clever as you. I could show you some of his work if you didn't mind."

"Oh, I should like to see it," said Matt, half amused at this unexpected interlude, though his temples throbbed with a shooting pain.

"Would you mind comin' down into the parlor, sir?"

"With pleasure," said Matt.

He followed his landlady down the narrow stairs into the musty little room, resplendent with oleographs and a gilt mirror and two fruit-shades.

"There," said Mrs. Lipchild, proudly. "Me and my husband in uniform."

Matt surveyed the large colored presentments of Mr. and Mrs. Lipchild in their oval mounts, further astonished to discover that his landlord was a policeman.

"What did he do them with?" asked Matt, rather puzzled.

"With his own hand," replied the proud mother. "They were taken quite plain, but he colored them lifelike, as you see. They would have charged half a crown more each, but for a shilling he bought a book telling him how to do it himself. My cousin Bob, who is in the Post-office, said he ought to be an artist, but I wouldn't let him give up his place at Brown

"'LOR' BLESS YOU, SIR,' SAID SHE, 'I'M NOT WORRYIN' ABOUT THE RENT'"

Brothers. He's in the grocery department, and earnin' good money, and I've seen such a heap of artists sittin' on the pavement, with the risk any moment of the rain washin' all the pictures out; don't you think I was right, sir?"

"Quite right," said Matt, heartily.

Mrs. Lipchild thereupon produced a bottle of brandy and what she called a "seedy-cake" from a cupboard under a sideboard, and insisted on Matt's partaking of the same. To refuse would pain her, to accept would refresh him, so he accepted. In the conversation which ensued it transpired that Mrs. Lipchild's daughter was about to marry a young man from Brown Brothers (haberdashery department), that the young couple were now furnishing, and that it had occurred to Mrs. Lipchild that they might get their parlor pictures from Matt instead of from a shop, if they could get them any cheaper.

So Matt and his art patroness remounted again to the bed-room studio and haggled over prices, Mrs. Lipchild pointing out that his pictures were far inferior to shop pictures, not only by their unsympathetic subjects, but by their absence of frames and glass, and that she could get much bigger sizes than any of his for five shillings apiece. But as it came to be understood that ready money would not be required, and that the price was to be reckoned off the rent, Mrs. Lipchild ultimately departed in possession of a month's worth of pictures—six of the prettiest landscapes and ladies in the collection, with Rapper's "Library" thrown in. The poetic street-scenes she scorned, much to Matt's relief, for he set no value on the earlier Nova Scotian work she had carried off.

This was Matt's first sale of pictures in the great Metropolis of Art.

Considerably exhilarated by the change in his fortunes, and revived by the brandy and the "seedy-cake," he reviewed the situation again, proof even against Billy's letter, which he put by for later consideration. He found himself actually smiling, for a phrase of Cornpepper's kept vibrating in his brain—"Art's neither moral nor immoral, any more than it's lunar or calendar." Mrs. Lipchild's last words had been: "Very well, we'll reckon it a month," and he wondered whimsically whether the month was to be lunar or calendar.

Under the impulse of these gayer sentiments, he resolved to raise money by pawning whatever he could part with, and by persisting in the search for an adventurous dealer; and reflecting that, after all, the tailor would be satisfied with an instalment, he wound himself up to the pitch of applying to Herbert by letter, though he could not bring himself to a verbal request.

My dear Herbert,—I am sorry to bother you again, but if you could let me have only five guineas to offer the tailor I should be very grateful. I hope soon to find work, or sell some things; and you will be pleased to hear that I have got over the difficulty with the rent — at least for the moment. Yours sincerely,

Matt Strang.

P.S.—Don't put yourself out if you cannot. You have been very kind to me, and I shall never forget it. I dare say I shall pull through somehow."

Matt carried this request to the pillar-box through the stuffy splendor of a summer night in Holborn back streets. As he heard the slight thud of the letter in the box he had a sense of something achieved, and had no compunction in spending one of his nine remaining pennies on his supper of "baked fagot" in a muggy pork-butcher's shop. Nightmare, followed by a giddy uprising with furred tongue and aching forehead, was the sequel of this devil-may-care diet, and early in the afternoon the nightmare seemed to resume its riot in the guise of a reply from Herbert.

Dear Matt,—What in the name of all that is unholy made you send that letter to my house instead of to the club? There's been a devil of a row. The Old Gentleman opened the letter. He pretends he did so without noticing, as it came mixed up with his, and so few come for me to the house. When I got down to breakfast the mater was in tears and the Old Gentleman in blazes. Of course, he'd misread it altogether—imagined you wanted to borrow money instead of to get it back (isn't it comical? It's almost an idea for a farce for our dramatic society), and insisted you had been draining me all along (you did write you were sorry to bother me again, you old duffer). Of course I did my best to dispel the misconception, but it was no use my swearing till all was blue that this was the first application, he wouldn't believe a word of it. He said he had had his suspicions all along, and he called the mater to witness that the first time he saw you in the shop he said you were a rogue. And at last the mater, who'd been stand-

ing up for you—I never thought she had so much backbone of her own—was converted, and confessed with tears that you had been here pretty nigh every day and swore you should never set foot here again, and the Old Gentleman dilated on the pretty return you had made for his kindness (sucking his boy's blood, he called it, in an unusual burst of poetry), and he likewise offered some general observations on the comparative keenness of a serpent's tooth and ingratitude. And that's how it stands. There's nothing to be done, I fear, but to let the thing blow over—he'll cool down after a time. Meanwhile, you will have to write to me at the club if you want to meet me. I am awfully sorry, as I enjoyed your visits immensely. Do let me know if I can do anything for you. I'm in a frightful financial mess, but I might give you introductions here or there. I know chaps on papers and that sort of thing. I am sure you have sufficient talent to get along—and you can snap your fingers at creditors, as you haven't got anything they can seize, and can flit any day you like. I wish I was you. With every good wish, Yours always,

HERBERT STRANG.

Matt took this letter more stoically than he would have predicted. He even grinned like a Red Indian at the stake. In truth, he was already so prostrated by illness, hunger, and above all by the heat, that there was nothing left in him to be prostrated. He crawled out soon after the receipt of the letter, and recklessly bought a halfpenny currant loaf, which he washed down with water.

CHAPTER VII

TOWARDS THE DEEPS

THE summer rolled heavily along, bringing strange new experiences to Matt Strang, and strange glimpses of other art-worlds than Herbert's. For he did not starve, though Herbert had gone quite out of his life, and he had none with whom to exchange the thoughts of youth.

Two pounds ten shillings lent on his dress-suit staved off hunger and his tailor (who got the pounds), till, by the aid of the landlady's son's book, he found out how to tint photographs, and earned sixpences and shillings by coloring cartes-de-visite

and cabinets for cheap touting photographers, censoriously critical and given to refusing the work of hours. By-and-by the *Christian Home* took him to its hearth, situate at the summit of a cobwebbed ramshackle staircase in Bolt Court, and paid him seven and sixpence for a half-page illustration of an unworldly serial. "Pay-day" was a delightful weekly emotion, the staff adjourning to a public-house in Fleet Street to drink one another's health and their own damnation. Matt was forced to join them because Dick Gattel, the puffy-faced author of the spiritual romance he was illustrating ("A Godly Atonement"), insisted on standing treat, declaring with odd oaths that he'd never been so well interpreted before by any blooming paper-smudger. He also initiated Matt into the secrets of his craft, summing up in a formula the experience of a quarter of a century of story-writing. "Emotion for the penny papers, excitement for the halfpenny, self-sacrifice for the religious." Strange impecunious beings gathered in this public-house or outside it, uncouth, unclean, unshaven; many had drifted down from society, from the universities, from the army, from the navy, with reserve forces from India and America, the flotsam of life's wreckage, and they consoled themselves by babbling of the seamy side of the successful, rolling under their tongues the money these others were making, and parading a confident familiarity with their doings and their pass-books. Matt shuddered at the thought that he might one day become even as these—the damned-before-death. There was another artist on the staff—a thick-set German, whose wife was wont to waylay him on "pay-day," and who always wrote on professional paper girdled with his own designs in proof of his prowess, and expressive of his willingness to undertake wash-drawings, line-drawings, color-work, or lithography, at reasonable rates and with prompt deliveries.

Through this German, who was good-natured after his second glass, Matt procured extra employment in a comic-picture factory managed by a solemn, snuffy Scotchman, who selected from old comic papers the jokes that were to be illustrated by his "hands," and, signing the sketches with his own name, peddled them in the offices of new comic papers. Matt was

paid half a crown per sketch, and his employer from four to five shillings; but when the young man tried to send original jokes and sketches direct to these papers, he got only the same two and sixpence for the few things they accepted. One editor, whose pages bristled with ballet-girls, took the trouble to explain to him that the presence of a clergyman in a sketch was a disqualification, as any attack on the Church would be distasteful to his public. From another, the *Merry Miracle*, whose proprietor was a philanthropist, a member of the school board, and a candidate for Parliament, he received a prospectus instructing him to eschew cross-hatching, solid black, line-work, and society figures, in favor of rough-and-tumble farce in bold outline. The more sober of the comic papers had settled staffs and settled jokes, and new-comers were not welcomed. Not that Matt's jokes were very good: labored verbal oddities for the most part, intellectual quips and cranks which, he was quite aware, lacked the true humorous insight of Jimmy Raven, upon whom he modelled himself, feeling no first-hand impulse. Humor, indeed, was not his vocation; when he saw the world through Jimmy's eyes he was tickled yet fortified, as one set face to face with the prose of the real, and finding it genial; but he could not see it like this himself. His was a world of beauty set over a strange, disquieting substratum of ugliness, from which it were best to avert one's eyes, and which, perhaps, existed only as something to aspire away from.

Jimmy Raven had published *A Sketch-Book of Beggars* which Matt Strang had found vastly entertaining; and yet Matt Strang saw rather the tragedy of beggars than their humor, and this tragedy seemed to him outside the realm of Art. It was only their occasional picturesqueness that attracted his artistic interest at this period of his development, and all the figures of his so-called comic sketches were either pretty or picturesque. He studied extensively in the streets, note-book in hand, fearful of losing the subtleties of nature through his inability to afford even the cheap, casual models of his first days in London, and training himself to catch the salient points of character or movement at first glance. Probably no artist ever made comic pictures so seriously as Matt Strang, with such

scrupulous backgrounds, in the which, when they were done in wash, he strove with entirely unappreciated thoroughness, by careful adjustment of values, to make his black and white yield veracious color-effects. When the drawings *were* accepted, they came out so reduced and so badly reproduced that the subtleties were blurred away, and the values quite transmuted. Wood-engraving falsified the lines or photography the color, and thus their appearance in print was as much a pain as a pleasure.

Matt's redemption from comic journalism was partly due to the prosperity of the proprietor of the comic-picture factory, who started a serious-art department, where Matt found less uncongenial work in painting figures into the landscapes of his less competent fellow-workmen. This gradually opened up to his astonished eyes a new section of the trade. He saw one of these landscapes near King's Cross, resplendent in a gorgeous gold frame, and marked "Original oil-painting — two guineas only," and another in a poor neighborhood marked "Water-color, hand-painted—a bargain!" and he perceived that he had been flying too high in his early attempts to approach dealers of the type of Drücker. Henceforward he haunted furniture dealers, picture-frame makers, and artists' colormen, and thus he occasionally obtained half a sovereign to despatch to his tailor. His drawings in the *Christian Home* attracted the attention of the editor of the *Working Man*, and Matt was commissioned to accompany a journalist through the East End to expose the evils of sweating. The *Working Man* was owned by a syndicate, and Matt had to settle terms with the manager, a truculent gentleman with a double chin and a double watch-chain, who agreed to give him five shillings a sketch. Matt did several sketches for each article, and the pathetic series caused a great stir and much correspondence; but at the end of the month—when poor Matt, who had already nearly starved himself for his tailor's sake, was expecting a goodly check to send to Abner Preep — he received only a quarter of what he had bargained for. He went to the editor, who referred him to the manager, who insisted the terms were five shillings for the illustration of a single article. "You must remember, too, what a

lift we are giving you, with our big circulation," concluded the manager, his double watch-chain heaving pompously on his abdomen. "It is not every young man who gets such a chance of showing what he can do."

"You're a set of damned scoundrels!" cried Matt, with an access of ancient rage, and had wellnigh torn up the check and thrown it in the manager's face, when his later chastened self plucked at his coat-tails and bade him begone with it. Who so helpless as the black-and-white artist, his work poorly paid, and reproduced again and again without his control; his very originals taken from him and sometimes sold at a profit?

It was not a happy time for Matt, this period of spiritless work by day and spiritless study by night, his soul chafing alike against the degradations of life and the routine of school. For what an actuality had he exchanged his dreams! Yet he had no option; the tailor must be paid, his family must be helped, and to these two ends, moreover, he himself must exist. But the friction of ideals and realities left him irritable and high-strung; and even when, towards the autumn, he won his way into the *Ladies' Weekly*, at a guinea an illustration, he lost his work by not concealing his contempt for the art editor, a pragmatic person, absolutely dead to art, but excessively fastidious about the drawings, which he refused whenever there was time for alterations.

"This is feeble, but we're pressed for time," was his encouraging apology to the artist for accepting his work, "and I'll put it into the hands of a competent engraver." His first self-revelation to Matt was his complaint about some rough shadows on the borders of a sketch: "I wish you would bear in mind, Mr. Strang, that we have to pay as much per inch for the reproduction of those blotches as for the most finished work." But it was not till the "old lady" (as the other artists called the art editor of the *Ladies' Weekly* behind his back) had insisted on his dressing his figures better that Matt lost control of his tongue and retorted, "I draw pictures, not fashion-plates." In after-remorse, he would have been glad to get fashion-plates to do. He replaced the lost work by returning to photo-tinting, though he now obtained more impor-

tant work on enlarged photographs, which he colored in oil at three and six apiece, managing to do two or three a day while the light held, without interfering with his black and white, which could be done at night; by which means he scraped together enough to pay off the tailor in full, and to send his promised contribution home, together with seven fourpenny halfpenny "Notable Novels" to reconcile Billy to his narrow existence. And then, with these burdens thrown off, his idealism resurged again, for beneath the placid everyday exterior of this homely young man, who trudged up foul staircases, portfolio under arm, or danced attendance on smug h-less photographers smoking twopenny cigars, a volcanic fire burned, and the thought of his precious youth wasted and abraded in this inartistic art-drudgery, under the yoke of vulgar souls, was a dull haunting torment. His qualms of self-distrust vanished under the pressure of obstacles, and the measure of his aversion from joyless commercial art became to him the measure of his genius. One gray windy forenoon of late autumn he had stopped to take a mental sketch of a strangely attired woman, who was listening to a Salvation Army exhortation, a woman who was a dab of color upon the dreary day. Below an enormous white hat with a recumbent ostrich feather and a broad brim with an upward slant, tied under the chin with black bands, shone through a black veil a glorious oval-shaped dark face with flashing eyes, full red lips, large shapely ears, and raven hair curling low over the forehead. She wore a black, half-masculine jacket, with big mother-of-pearl buttons and a yellow bow that was awry, and by a shapely hand cased in a white glove with three black stripes she held the skirts of a slaty gown clear of the mud.

While Matt was whimsically wondering what the editor of the *Christian Home* would say to a sketch of her in his staid organ, he instinctively noted the other romantic touches about the scene, ineffably grimy though the roadway was to the inartistic eye, flanked on one side by a coal office, with a bleareyed old man at the window, and on the other by a canal running lengthwise. There were fresh country faces among the girl-soldiers, and among the men was an ex-heathen in a turban, a flaring Paisley shawl, flowing robes, and sandals, bearing aloft

a red flag with a blue border and a central yellow star, around which ran the words "Blood and Fire." And while his eye selected the picturesque points, the whole scene passed half insensibly into his sub-consciousness as into a camera, to be developed in after-years—the grotesque snag-toothed hags in the crowd, the collarless men with the air of being connected with the canal, one of them with a Mephistophelian red tuft on his chin; the ice-cream stall at the corner, where a postman, a baby of three, and an urchin with his collar paradoxically up against the cold were licking green glasses. And then a buxom work-girl with a tambourine began to hold forth, pouring out breathless sentences all running into one another, clutching her inspiration tight lest it should escape her, and repeating herself endlessly rather than pause for a moment.

"Only the blood of Christ can save only the blood of Christ has saved only the blood of Christ will save."

And her fellow-soldiers, quivering with unction, punctuated her shapeless periods with soul-wrung ejaculations.

"Ah, yes."

"Bless her."

"Glory to God."

"You may try earthly pleasures you may go to the theaytre," she gasped, "but it brings no peace nothing brings peace but the Rock but the Lamb—"

"Hallelujah!"

"But the oldest of all religions proved over and over again Christianity tried in the furnace any day you may die no one knows the end now's the time don't put it off come are you prepared once I had bad companions—"

"A—a—ah!" groaned a melodramatic brother, with folded arms.

"But I gave them up—"

"Glory!" in a great sob of relief from all the palpitating figures.

Matt began to forget the visual aspects of the scene; the infectious emotion of the girl and her comrades gained upon him. What she was saying left no dint on his mind—to her dogmas he was become indifferent. But her earnestness thrilled

him, her impassioned ignorance flashed upon him a clearer sense of baseness, hollowness, insincere falling away from the ideals that had sailed with him to England, glorifying the noisome steerage. Turning his head, he saw tears rolling down the dark passionate face of his dashing neighbor, and he hurried away, shaken and troubled, pursued by the cacophonous melody into which the street congregation had broken.

What was the point of his life? What had he become?

At Grainger's there were fellows who looked to Art as an escape from some worse-paid calling. That was not, had never been, his idea. To him Art was an end in itself; he was of those who live to paint, not paint to live. Even in his boyish days, when the vendibility of pictures first came within his ken, the money had always seemed to him a pleasant by-product, not a motive. And now, instead of pouring out on canvas all that effervescence of youthful poetry that flooded his soul, he was coloring photographs and illustrating foolish stories for foolish editors in contravention of all his own ideas of what illustrations should be. Why, even in Nova Scotia he had painted from the life; in his lowest days he had decorated furniture at his own pleasure. Oh, it was sordid, unworthy, humiliating! He would give it all up: if he could not pursue Art, at least he would not degrade it. Thanks to his Nova-Scotian training, his good right hand could do more than wield the brush. Better to earn bread and water for himself and his family by some honest craft, till such time as honest Art came within his means. Rather an honest artisan than a dishonest artist. And while he was still hot with the impulse he looked through the advertisement columns of the *Clerkenwell Chronicle*, and answered three demands, one for a "joiner," another for a "sugar-boiler," and the third for a "harness-cleaner."

The sugar-boiling firm alone answered, and he was asked to call. He stated that he had had considerable experience of the manufacture in Nova Scotia, but a brief conversation convinced the manager that the applicant knew nothing of scientific sugar-boiling, with its elaborate engines and differentiation of labor; but Matt's sober, respectable appearance and his conviction of

his capacity stood him in good stead, and he was given a fortnight's trial at eighteen shillings a week, with a prospect of rising to forty. In his confidence of mastering the easy detail, and to clinch his resolution, he wrote to his art patrons throwing up his position in each establishment with due form and superfluous sarcasm, and one happy morning, soon after sunrise, repaired to the factory with a more buoyant tread than had been his since the memorable day when he crossed the great bridge which led to the heart of all the splendors.

The fortnight's end found him spiritually seared and physically scalded. The depressing society of the British working-man, the ever-present contrast of the blank building with the free forest in which he had made sugar in his boyhood (how happy his boyhood seemed now!), and the overflowing contents of the seething boilers, demonstrated to him daily that he had made a mistake. He might have stayed on nevertheless, but the dread that an accidental scald on the hand might permanently injure his power with the brush made the trial fortnight his last. He scanned the advertisement columns again, with no suspicion of what now awaited him.

He had been misled by the comparative facility with which he had found work hitherto; he was now destined to re-experience —far more poignantly than in New Brunswick—the long-drawn agony of unemployment, the sickness of hope deferred; to bruise himself against the ruthless indifference of an overstaffed nation; to see and hear the blind, deaf forces of the social machine grind out happiness for all but him. At first he did not mind getting no replies, except for the waste of stamps, for he took feverish advantage of the hours of daylight thus left free for Art. But as day followed day, and week followed week, the perturbation of his soul and the weakness of his body, enfeebled by hunger and cold, made painting difficult; and he had not even the capital to expend on canvas. Broken in health and pride, he applied again for his old work, prepared even to tint cartes-de-visite. But his place had been filled up. The stream of human life had flowed on as if he had never been. The work he had got was the only work in London open to a man in his position, and this work he had thrown away. One of

the papers he had so imprudently quarrelled with was willing to take him on again, but at half the price. Subdued as he was, a pride he afterwards felt to have been insane spurred him to refuse. He fancied he could get such terms from a score of other papers, but he was mistaken. In truth, black and white was no more his *métier* than humor. The rush into black and white, of which he had first heard at Cornpepper's, had filled the ranks with abler men or of older standing, with a better appreciation of the market, and of how to draw for reproduction by the new processes just coming up. And he had yet to learn, also, that the world went very well without him; that it had no need for him either as artist or artisan, craftsman or clerk; that every hole had its peg, round or square; and that he was of no more account in the surging life of London than the fallen leaves blown about the bleak squares.

He earned a few odd shillings now and then for his old pictures by persuading some small skinflint dealer to cheat him; and that was all. Once he was cruelly tantalized—a five-pound commission to copy a National Gallery picture being dangled before him, only to be withdrawn. He parted with all but the barest necessities—with the fashionable morning suit, with his pistol, with the Gregson boots; his only luxury was the engraving of the "Angelus," which he had retained because nobody offered more than eighteenpence for it. The bulk of the money thus raised was remitted to Abner Preep, as promised; the rest went to pay Mrs. Lipchild. Himself he so stinted that often when he went to Grainger's (which he had fortunately prepaid) he took care to arrive first, not only because of the warmth, but because the girl students, whose class preceded his, left stale crusts lying about, whose crumb had been used up on their charcoal drawings. To such straits may a man sink in a few weeks, though he sinks slowly, for each week is a year to him. But outwardly he preserved dignity, brushing his one suit scrupulously, and glad that, owing to his interlude of fashionable tailoring, it was still in good condition; for the vision of the lost mortals was ever before his eyes, and he foresaw that without a decent appearance he would not be able to grasp an opportunity even when it came, but would be driven down

to the deeps to join the damned souls outside that Fleet Street public-house, within which the happier staff of the *Christian Home* ushered in the Sabbath with beer.

And the more London refused him the more his consciousness of power grew. As he tramped the teeming streets in quest of a job or a customer, a thousand ideas for great pictures jostled in his sick brain, a thousand fine imaginings took form and shape in beautiful color-harmonies and majestic groupings. In the ecstatic frenzy of moments of hysterical revolt against the blind forces closing in upon him like a tomb to shut him out forever from the sunlight, he grew Titanic to his own thought, capable of masterpieces in any and every kind of art—great heroic frescos like Michael Angelo's, great homely pictures like those of the Dutch, great classic canvases like Raphael's, great portraits like Rembrandt's, great landscapes like Turner's, great modern street-pieces like Cornpepper's, great mediæval romances like Erle-Smith's, not to say great new pictures that should found the school of Strang, combining all the best points of all the schools, the ancient poetry with the modern realism. Nay, even literary impulses mingled with artistic in these spasms of nebulous emotion, his immature genius not having yet grasped the limitations of the paintable. Good God! what did he ask? Not the voluptuous round of the young men whose elegant silhouettes standing out against the black, silent night from the warm lighted windows of great houses athrob with joyous music filled him with a mad bitterness; not the soft rose-leaf languors of the beautiful white women who passed in shimmering silks and laces from gleaming spick-and-span carriages under canvas awnings over purple carpets amid spruce, obsequious footmen; not the selfish joys of these radiant shadows dancing their way to dusty oblivion, to be trodden under foot by the generations over which he would shine as a star, serene, immortal; but bread and water and a little money for models and properties, and a top-light straight in touch with heaven, and a few pounds to send home to his kith and kin; but to paint, to paint, to joy in conception and to glory in difficult execution, to express the poetry of the ideal through real flesh and real shadows and real foliage, and find a rapturous agony in the search for perfection; to paint, to paint,

to exult fiercely in the passing of faces, with their pathos and their tragedy, to catch a smile on a child's face and the grace of a girl's movement and the passion in the eyes of a woman; to watch the sunrise consecrating tiles and chimneys, or the river, mirroring a thousand night-lights, glide on, glorifying its own uncleanness; to express the intense stimulus of the wonderful city, resonant with the tireless tread of millions of feet, vibrant with the swirl of perpetual currents of traffic, pulsating with the rough music of humanity—roaring markets, shrilling trains, panting steamships; to record in pigment not only the romance of his dreams or the glamour of the dead past, but the poetry of the quick—the rich, full life of the town, the restless day and the feverish night, with its mysterious perspectives of fitful gleams; to paint, to paint, anything, everything, for the joy of eternalizing the transient beauty that lurked everywhere—in the shimmer of a sunlit puddle, in the starry heaven, in the motions of barefoot children dancing to a barrel-organ, in the scarlet passing of soldiers, in the play of light on the fish in a huckster's barrow, in the shadowy aisles of city churches throbbing with organ diapasons.

Oh, the joy of life! Oh, the joy of Art that expressed the joy of life!

Yes, but in the absence of a few bits of metal, neither joy nor Art nor even life could be his. He must die, be swept off from among the surging crowds of which he was an unnoticed unit, and no one would ever know what mighty things he had dreamed and suffered in his little span of years. Every supper eaten by radiant couples at richly lit restaurants would have nourished him for weeks, nor did it diminish the bitter socialistic sentiment this reflection caused him to remember that he himself had fared as wantonly once and again. At least, he had earned his money. What gave those young men with the vacant faces, those women with the improbable complexions, the right to all the good things at the table of life? Even Herbert was splashed by this wave of bitterness; Herbert, the brilliant, with his battalion of boots. Ah! poor little Billy was right. It was impossible to believe in anything—to see any justice in life.

And was it worth while going on? The thought presented itself again and again, especially in those November days when London was as dark as his own soul; and it made him half sorry, half glad that a grim Providence had sent his pistol to the pawnshop. He was walking to Grainger's one evening in such a double darkness of without and within, when the memory came to him of a newspaper paragraph concerning people who had wandered into the river, and, hypnotized by the idea, he bent his steps towards the docks, with a vague intention of giving death a chance. What did it matter what became of his brothers and sisters? It were better that they died too. In any case he could not help them any more; he had just scraped together the usual remittance, but he could not see where the next was to come from. But his semi-somnambulistic motion did not bear him towards the water-side; in the gray obscurity he erred endlessly in strange ghostly squares, whose chill iron-railed enclosures loomed like cemeteries through the sepulchral air.

London smelled like a boiled sponge; the raw air reeked with sulphurous grime, as if the chimneys of hell had been swept. It was not an inviting world to remain in. A gigantic brown head of a horse suddenly shot past his. He jumped back, but a shadowy wheel caught him in the pit of the stomach and hurled him across the road, where he fell on his back, hearing inarticulate noises from the cabman, and just seeing the hansom swallowed up again by the yellow sea. He got up, feeling dazed and indignant, rather than hurt, and staggered along in purposeless pursuit of the vanished cab. He found himself in a business street, where the illumined shop-fronts thinned the fog. A familiar face, with a strange green light upon it from a chemist's window, burst upon him as unexpectedly as the horse. It was Tarmigan's. He studied it abstractedly for a moment in its greenish pallor, with its deep furrows, seeming to read clearly a weariness and heart-sickness akin to his own, and struck for the first time by the shabbiness and flaccidity of the figure. Then the face took a more joyous expression than he had ever seen in it, and he heard Tarmigan saying:

"Hullo, Strang! Are you lost, too?"

"Yes, sir—at least, I don't quite know, sir," he replied, like one awaking from a dream.

"You're usually at Grainger's at this hour. I'm on my way there. If you are going to-night we had better keep together."

"Thank you, sir," said Matt.

He went into the chemist's to inquire their whereabouts, and feeling a little stiff, had the sudden idea of laying out his last coppers in arnica; then he began to pilot his master with a sense of lofty responsibility. But they walked in silence, mutually embarrassed.

Tarmigan coughed lengthily.

"Ought you to be out on a night like this, sir?" Matt ventured to say.

"Duty, my boy, duty," rejoined Tarmigan, gruffly.

"But you are not bound to go, are you, sir?" Matt remonstrated, remembering that Tarmigan's services were a voluntary sacrifice at the shrine of Art.

"I am not forced by an outsider, if that's what you mean," said Tarmigan. "But that wouldn't be duty, that would be necessity—at least, in my definition."

"Then duty is only what you feel you ought to do," said Matt.

"Decidedly. Any man who knows what true Art is is bound to hand it down to the next generation, especially in an age when there is so much false doctrine in the air."

"But can't each generation find out its own Art?" Matt asked, timidly.

"Can each generation find out its own science?" Tarmigan retorted, sharply. "In all things there is a great human tradition, and the torch is handed down from generation to generation; otherwise we should be in a nice fog," he added, grimly, and coughed again. "And a nice fog the young men are in who reject the light of the past, with their azure Art, and their violet nonsense, and their slapdash sketchiness."

"But they seem to be gaining the public ear," Matt murmured, liking neither to contradict his master nor to agree with him.

"The public ear!" Tarmigan laughed scornfully. "Yes,

they gain that, but not the public eye, thank God. That can still tell slipshod botchery from honest, faithful work."

"But Cornpepper is in the Academy this year," Matt reminded him.

"Yes; the Academy lets itself be outbawled," said Tarmigan, sharply. "I wish I were a member!"

"I wish you were," said Matt, fervently.

Tarmigan coughed.

"I didn't mean what you mean," he said, gruffly.

"Oh, but they ought to elect you, sir!" said Matt, rushing in on delicate ground in his enthusiasm for the man's character. "Everybody says so."

"Who's everybody?" Tarmigan inquired, bitterly. "Society doesn't say so, for I don't go to its drawing-rooms; the R.A.'s don't say so, for I'm unknown to their wives. But I am unjust. Let us drop the subject. After all, a man's work stands, even if he is passed over in his lifetime."

Matt felt a sharp pang of sympathy for this strong, stern man sustained by the false dream of immortality. He could not conceive that posterity would care a rap for Tarmigan's cold classic pictures. Indeed, now that he had assimilated all that was good in Tarmigan's teaching, he only went to the studio for the sake of the model and the practice. Emotion and embarrassment kept him silent.

"Do you live with your people?" Tarmigan asked, presently, in an interested tone.

"No," said Matt; "they are in America."

"Oh, ah, yes; so you told me. You're not married?"

"No."

"Nor engaged, I hope?"

"No," said Matt, wonderingly.

"That's right. No artist should marry. His wife is sure to drag him down to sacrifice his Art to her pleasures and wants. Fine feathers and fine houses are ruining English Art. I warn you of this, because you have the makings of an artist if you work hard."

"You are very kind, sir," said Matt, touched.

"Not at all. You have a fine natural talent, still undisciplined.

So long as you keep yourself free from matrimonial complications you may hope to achieve something. A single man can live on bread and water. I am heartily glad to hear you have nobody to keep but yourself."

Matt smiled grimly under the imagined cover of the fog.

"Ah, I know what you're smiling at," said Tarmigan, more genially than he had yet spoken. "You're wondering whether the preacher is a bachelor. Well, I am proud to say I'm still single, though I can't boast of living on bread and water. You see, it isn't only the expense; marriage spoils the silent incubation of ideas; the wife wants her husband, not his Art."

"But suppose an artist falls in love—isn't it hard on him?" asked Matt.

"No man can serve two masters. Every artist has got to ask himself, Does he want Happiness, or does he want Art? That choice will face *you* one day, Mr. Strang."

"I hope not," said Matt. "But I guess Art's enough for me." He spoke in a tone of quiet conviction, and his bosom swelled. Happiness, forsooth! How could there be Happiness apart from Art? Or how could Art be apart from Happiness?

Their talk fell to a lower level. Matt casually expressed an ardent wish to see sundry R.A.'s, especially the president. He had only come across the second-rate painters or the young men. He felt vaguely that he was at one with Butler and Greme and Herbert, and apparently Tarmigan also, in despising them, though he had only seen one of their exhibitions; they were in power and popular, and therefore time-serving mediocrities. Yet beneath all this prejudice was a keen curiosity about them, and a latent respect for these oldsters who had arrived. Tarmigan promised to get him a ticket for the prize distribution of the Academy Schools next month, when he would see most of them. The suggestion of suicide slunk into the rear; the spectacle of the Academicians was something to live for. Then the old man and the young relapsed into silent thoughts of their art, projecting visions of ideal beauty on the background of yellow, grimy vapor that shrouded the great dreary city.

But when Matt sat down to paint that night he found himself

incapacitated, a mass of aches and bruises. He went home to anoint himself with his arnica; in the unconscious optimism of sickness the suggestion of suicide had vanished altogether.

CHAPTER VIII

"GOLD MEDAL NIGHT"

With a step that faltered from nervousness even more than from the weakness due to a diet of one meal per diem, Matt Strang passed across the clangorous court-yard of Burlington House, nigh turned back by the imposing bustle of broughams and cabs, whose shadows were thrown sharply on the stones under the keen, frosty starshine of the December night. In the warm-lighted hall he shrank back, even more timidly, blinking at the radiance of the company, the white shirt-fronts of the men, the dazzling shoulders of the women. Before a counter a block of black figures struggled to get rid of their hats and coats in exchange for numbers. Matt hid his hat, fortunately flexible, in the pocket of his overcoat, which, being the least shabby of his vestments by reason of its summer vacation, he did not dare to take off; otherwise he would not have dared to keep it on. There were spots of discoloration on the concealed garments, for they had suffered from the week's job, which, together with the expectation of this gala-night, had kept him alive since he had met Tarmigan in the fog three weeks before. As a house-painter and distemperer Matt had still hovered on the verge of Art, and if Butler was right in his interpretation of the Academy of his day, and the highest art was indeed to conceal paint, then was the young Nova Scotian strictly Academic in retaining his overcoat on this most Academic of occasions. He marched with the courage of desperation up a broad crimson staircase, keenly conscious of the frayed edges of his trousers, and mistily aware of overarching palms and bordering flower-pots and fashionable companions, and surrendered the ticket Tarmigan had given him to a sumpt-

uous official who seemed a part of the ornamental avenue to the Academic salons. Once safely past this point the haze cleared, and he saw, to his joy, less fashionable figures in frock-coats and ladies in hats and jackets, and though he wished they had been more numerous and more dowdy, he felt a morsel more at ease. There seemed to be pictures on view, and he eagerly joined the sparse groups of spectators that promenaded the rooms, in curious contrast with the crush of the populace the last time he had walked, at the price of a shilling, within these historic walls. The exhibition was curious: in one room dozens of semi-detached heads, some evidently from the same model; in another, cartoons of draped figures; in a third, sculptures. He saw from a placard that they had been done in competition for the prizes that were to be adjudged to-night. He heard scraps of foolish criticism from the people about him, but his commerce with art-editors had blunted his once sensitive nerves, and he was only amused. From the pictures his eyes strayed to the spectators, and he wondered which were celebrities. It occurred to him, with a pang of dismay, that in the absence of any cicerone he might go away no wiser than he had come, and he remembered with regret the personally conducted tour he had made through the Reynolds Club. Would his uncle be here to-night? he thought, with apprehensive shrinking. As he moved aimlessly about, thinking of the Old Gentleman, his heart leaped to see—not Matthew Strang, but "Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar," and not the "Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar" he knew, but other Daniels and other Nebuchadnezzars—a veritable vision of Daniels and Nebuchadnezzars, a gallery of Daniels and Nebuchadnezzars, perspectives of Daniels and Nebuchadnezzars, stretching away on both sides of the room; young clean-shaven Daniels and old gray-bearded Daniels and middle-aged Daniels with mustaches, Daniels with uplifted arms and Daniels with downcast eyes, Daniels dressed and Daniels undressed, Daniels with flashing faces and Daniels with turned backs, and Nebuchadnezzars analogously assorted, and palaces of equal variety and backgrounds of similar dissimilarity, each tableau differing in properties and supernumeraries, but all appearing only the more alike because of their differences, so conventional were the variations.

Matt divined instantly that the picture Herbert had painted must be among them, and he looked about ardently for the painted palace in which he had spent so many happy hours. Ah! there it was, the dear old canvas, though it had an undreamed-of grandeur in its broad gold frame; there was Daniel and there was "Nebby," more finished than when he had last seen Herbert at work on them that fatal midsummer day, but essentially unchanged. He felt quite a small proprietary interest in it, unconscious how much it really owed to him; his touches on the actual final canvas had been but few, and these mainly suggestions in pastel, and his remembrance of the scaffolding work that preceded was hopelessly blurred by the countless discussions. He was shaken by a resurgence of pleasant memories of these artistic talks and merry lunches, with the bright sunshine streaming down on the skin rugs and the gleaming busts. He became absorbed in the painting, seeing episodes of the past in it, like a magician looking into a pool of ink. And then he was pierced to the marrow as by an icy wind; he heard an ecstatic voice ejaculating "Isn't it beautiful? The dear boy!" in charming foreign accents, and he divined the Vandyke beard hovering haughtily in his rear. He felt the couple had come to see their son's work, and he tried to sidle away unperceived, but an advancing group forced him to turn round, and he found himself eye to eye with Madame, whose radiant face of praise was exchanged for one of smiling astonished welcome when she caught sight of him.

"My dear young—" she began, in accents of lively affection. Then Matt saw her face freeze suddenly, and he quailed beneath the glooming eyebrows of her dignified consort, who swept round the other way with the frozen lady on one arm and Herbert on the other, turning three backs to his nephew in a sort of triple insult. The semicircular sweep which veered Madame off brought Herbert near, and Matt's heart beat more rapidly as his whilom chum's dress-coat, with its silk facings, brushed against his tightly buttoned overcoat. The glimpse he had of Herbert's face showed it severe, impassive, and devoid of recognition; but ere the young gentleman had quite swept past he managed to give his homely cousin a droll dig in the ribs, which

was as balm in Gilead to the lonely youth, and brought back in a great wave all his fondness for his dashing relative, with whom he now felt himself a fellow conspirator in a facetious imbroglio. The last lees of his bitterness were extruded by the dig; he gazed with affectionate admiration after the solemn swallow-tails of his cousin, receding staidly and decorously up the avenue of Daniels, at one or other of which his disengaged hand pointed with no faintest suggestion of droll digs in its immaculate cuff and delicately tapering fingers. Presently there was a marked move in a particular direction, and Matt, joining the current, was floated towards a great room filled with chairs, and already half full of gentlefolks. He made instinctively for the rear, but finding himself amid a mob of young fellows in evening dress, some of them sporting the ivory medal of studentship, he retreated farther towards the front, ultimately taking up a position on the last chair of the left extremity of the fourth row from the back, out of view of the incomers streaming through the oaken panels. It was a broad oblong room, with skylights in the handsome ceiling, and large water-colors hanging on the walls. A temporary dais covered by a crimson baize and ascended by a crimson step faced the audience, and at its central point stood a reading-desk lighted from the right by a lamp. Matt heard whispered comments on the new-comers from his neighbors; now it was a knighted brewer who rolled his corporeal cask into a front seat, now it was a musical conductor with an air of exile from the central desk. A few painters of eminence with neither handles nor tails to their names dotted Art about the audience, while wives and daughters of the Academically distinguished exhaled an aroma of fashion, striving to banish all reminiscences of paint from everything but their complexions; here and there was an actor out of employment or a strayed nondescript celebrity, and on a plush couch to the right of the platform a popular author chatted noisily with a pretty, vivacious lady journalist; the mixture was completed by a few favored relatives of the students, like Mr. and Madame Strang, whose anxious faces were clearly visible to Matt in a diagonal direction a few rows ahead. Herbert himself herded with his fellow-students, who had taken exclu-

sive possession of the back rows, where they stood in evening dress, a serried gallery of black-and-white figures, prophesying "all the winners."

A great round of applause from their ranks set everybody peering towards the door, only to encounter the stern gaze of the magnificent beadle, whose entry had prompted the salvoes, and who, arrayed in what appeared to be a rich red dressing-gown, showed like a Venetian color-study amid a collection of engravings.

A more general outburst of clapping, accompanied by a buzz of interest, greeted the arrival of the less picturesque "train" of Academicians, headed by the president. The procession, bowing and smiling, defiled slowly towards the dais, especial enthusiasm being reserved for the more popular or the newest Academicians and Associates, the students having a ruling hand or hands in the distribution of the noise. Matt craned forward eagerly to see these pillars of English Art, whose names flew from lip to lip. As they only looked like men, he had a flash of self-confidence.

The president takes his seat on the central chair, flanked and backed by the faithful forty and the trusty thirty, minus the absentees. The R.A.'s dispose themselves along the front bench, the A.R.A.'s occupy the rear—a younger set, on the whole, with more hair on their heads and less on their chins. The beadle solemnly slides the oak panels to, cloistering the scene from the world, and a religious silence spreads from him till it infects even the excited back rows. The president rises bland and stately. There is a roar of welcome, succeeded by a deeper hush. It is seen that he has papers on his desk, and is about to declare the results of the competitions, and to determine the destiny of dozens, if not the future of English Art. There is no vulgar sensationalism. With a simple dignity befitting the venerable self-sufficient institution, which still excludes great newspapers—and great painters—from its banquets, he disdains working up to a climax, and starts with the tidbit of the evening, "the gold medal and travelling studentship for £200," awarded every two years for the best historical painting, the subject this year being "Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar." The presi-

dent pauses for a breathless instant. The ranks of black-and-white figures standing in the background have grown rigid with excitement. The president imperturbably announces "Herbert Strang." There is a brief pause for mental digestion, then a great crash of applause — the harmonious cacophony of clapping hands, generous lungs, and frenzied feet. Matt, thrilling through and through with joy and excitement, shouting frantically, and applauding with all his limbs, turns to look for Herbert amid the students, but sees only rows of heaving shirt-fronts and animated black arms. Then he becomes aware of his cousin strolling leisurely along the near side of the room, through a mad tempest of cheering, towards the president's desk, a faint smile playing about his beautiful boyish lips, which yet tremble a little. Matt feels proud of being the cousin of the hero of the moment, whose course he follows with tear-dimmed eyes. He sees him reach the presidential desk and receive a medal and an envelope from the great man, who shakes hands with him and evidently offers words of congratulation. He follows his passage back to his fellow-students through the undiminished tempest. Then his eye lights suddenly on Matthew Strang's face, and sees great tears rolling down towards the Vandyke beard, while beside him Madame Strang, her face radiating sunshine, her eyes dancing, throws kisses towards the cynosure of all eyes, who, carrying his honors, and studiously avoiding the weakness of a glance in the direction of his parents, ploughs his way amid fraternal back-thumpings to his place among his cronies. There is a rapid exchange of criticism and gossip among the students, ejaculations of commiseration for Flinders, whose friends had convinced him that he would win, and for Rands, a poor devil of talent, the only hope of a desperately genteel family in Dalston. But comment must be hushed, for other prizes, some of them important enough, have to be announced. There is a steady succession of individual students, more or less blushing, moving to and from the president's congratulatory hand, some stumbling nervously against the crimson step placed in front of his desk, probably by the beadle to disconcert the shy. Some fortunate prize-winners come up three times, and stumble three

times. Sometimes they are girls. One wears spectacles and a yellow sash, and has the curved back of the student; another is pretty and *petite*, and causes a furore by her multiplex successes and her engaging charm; a third is handsome, but gawky, with bare red arms. A young man who wins two events attracts special attention by his poetical head and his rapt air of mystic reverie, and goes back winking. Then the president commences his biennial address to an audience of students throbbing with excitement, afire with the after-glow of all that applause, anxious to canvass the awards, and dying to run out into the other rooms to look at the winning pictures, which have, in some instances, been dark horses which nobody remembers to have noticed.

His theme is the Evolution of Ecclesiastical Art. For half an hour the audience, always with the exception of the students he is addressing, listens patiently to the procession of ornate periods, classically chiselled, hoping to emerge from the dulness and gloom of obscure epochs into the light of familiar names. Then the seats begin to feel hard. By the aid of copious shufflings, wrigglings, and whisperings, they drag through another bad quarter of an hour, relieved only by the mention of Albrecht Dürer, whose name is unaccountably received with rapturous cheers, as if he were a political allusion. The next quarter of an hour is lightened by the feeling that it is to be the last. But, as the second hour arrives without a harbinger sentence, three brave men arise and pass through the beadle-guarded portal. There is tremendous cheering from the back, which is taken up and re-echoed from all parts of the room, and the president beams and turns over a new page.

The seats become granite, the presidential eloquence flows on as if it would wear them away; an endlessly trickling stream. He enters into painful analyses of vanished frescos, painted in churches long since swept away, and elaborates punctilious appreciations of artists and architects known only to biographical dictionaries. Some have fancy without imagination, some imagination without fancy, a few both fancy and imagination, and the rest neither imagination nor fancy. The stream strewn with dead names flows on slow and stately, with never a playful eddy, and another man, greatly daring,

fortified by the example of his gallant predecessors, steals from the room, and blushes to find it fame. Amid the plaudits that ring around this manful deed, Matt suddenly finds Herbert at his side. His cousin slips a note into his hand and retreats hastily to his place. Excited and glad of the relief, he opens it and reads: "Meet me outside after this rot is over. Don't let the Old Gentleman see you." Matt smiles, proud and happy to resume his old relations with the hero of the evening, and pleased to find the ancient password of "the Old Gentleman" supplementing the droll dig in the ribs in re-setting their *camaraderie* on its ancient footing. In his eagerness to talk to Herbert again and to congratulate him personally, the presidential oration seems to him duller and the seat more adamantine than ever. He strains his ears to catch instead the babble of the students, who have finally given up any pretence of interest in mediæval Flemish cathedrals. His eye, long since satiate with the sight of the celebrities, roves again over the faces of the Academicians on their platform, austere in their striving to appear absorbed, and again he draws confidence from their merely human aspect. He watches the popular novelist gossiping with the vivacious lady journalist. He examines for the eighth time the water-colors on the walls, which he gathers, from one of the many conversations going on in his neighborhood, are by the competitors for the Turner prize. He sees that the hard-worked newspaper artist in the row in front of him has given up sketching and gone to sleep, despairing of escape. The pangs of his own stomach keep him awake; he looks forward wistfully to the hour of release, resolved to treat himself to twopennyworth of supper in honor of Herbert's triumph. But the interminable voice goes on, discoursing learnedly and elegantly of apses and groins and gargoyles. The wrigglings have ceased. All around, but especially in the quiet front rows under the presidential eye, apathetic listless beings droop on their chairs. Matt steals a glance towards his uncle, and finds him the only member of the audience genuinely alert and interested, his head perked up, his eyes gazing admiringly towards the rostrum, where perchance in imagination he already sees his son carrying on the time-honored tradition of the great

Sir Joshua. At his side Madame sustains herself by furtive looks in the direction of the same young gentleman. Then Matt turns his attention to the speaker, watching his mouth open and shut, and his shapely hand turning the perpetual pages. He expects that every moment will be the orator's last. But the great man is just warming to his work. His silvery voice, rising above the buzz and the murmur, descants dreamily on the spiritual aspirations of uncouthly christened architects, who had mouldered in their graves long centuries before his Gracious Majesty George III., patron of arts and letters, gave the Academy house-room. After an hour and a half he launches lightly into a treatise on glass-staining. The audience has now given up all hope. It has the sense of condemnation to an earthly inferno, in which the suave voice of a fiend of torture, himself everlastingly damned, shall forever amble on, unwinding endless erudition. A reference to "my young architectural friends," greeted with suspicious thunders by all the students, affords a momentary break in the monotony. The end comes suddenly, after a "Lastly," forgotten ten minutes before. There is a brief interval of incredulity. People awakened by the silence look up sleepily. Yes, there is no doubt. The president is actually down. Then a great roar of joy bursts out from all sides. The back benches go delirious, and then the meeting dissolves in a stampede towards the oaken panels, at last open in three places. The discharged prisoners swarm down the grand staircase and besiege the cloak-rooms; some parade the rooms to inspect the winning pictures, now ticketed, and to express their surprise at the judges' decisions.

Outside in the cold air, which immediately began to make him sneeze through the compulsory imprudence of having worn his overcoat throughout, Matt lurked about looking for Herbert, and at last the hero appeared, carefully muffled and wrapped up, and with a murmur of "Wasn't it awful? Wait by the Arcade till my people's cab rolls off," dashed back. When he reappeared, smiling sunnily, he explained that he had told his people he must show up at the Students' Club in order not to appear caddish. "I've been slobbered over enough," he add-

ed, whimsically flicking the traces of an imaginary maternal kiss off his fresh, smooth cheek.

"Oh, but I don't wonder your people are delighted," said Matt; "I know I am. I haven't congratulated you yet." And he shook his cousin's hand heartily.

"Thank you, old fellow; it's very good of you. Oh, by-the-way, don't mention to anybody I let you see the picture on the easel, will you? One is supposed to keep it to one's self, don't you know. That's why I didn't tell you I was doing it for the Gold Medal."

"Oh, who should I mention it to?" asked Matt, reassuringly.

"That's a good chap. You see, if it got out that I talked it over with you there might be a bother; people are so jealous, especially now that it has won."

"Oh, I sha'n't tell a soul, you may depend," said Matt. "It was very good of you to let me come so often and chat about it; and even if I did save you a little trouble in working out the perspective, I learned a great deal about composition from you."

"Don't mention it," said Herbert.

"Oh, I won't," said Matt, gravely; whereat Herbert laughed, and replied: "Now *you* must do an Academy picture, old fellow. There's three months' time yet."

"Would there be any chance of my getting in?" asked Matt, wistfully. He had been fluttered by the applause of the evening; it seemed impossibly grand to be the centre of an admiring fashionable assemblage, instead of a shabby alien hovering on its outside rim. In such company the colossal self-confidence of his solitary exaltations dwindled to a pitiful sense of his real insignificance.

"Rather," replied Herbert. "Why, I thank my stars you weren't a competitor. I should never have got the medal if you had been."

Matt shook his head deprecatingly, but Herbert rattled on with increasing enthusiasm. "Wouldn't it be jolly if you got a picture in and it was hung on the line next to mine? Now that I've taught you composition and educated you up to the Academy's ideas, you could easily do something that would take the old buffers' fancy, and then, once you got a show in the

Academy, the Old Gentleman would take up your work and run you."

"I don't think they'd take what I wanted to do."

"Oh, but you mustn't want to do it," said Herbert. "At least, not till you can afford it. Besides, I'm not so sure that there isn't something in the Academy's ideas, after all. Candidly, I don't quite see how Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar could have been treated any better."

"I don't want to treat them at all," said Matt.

"Well, anyway, do something, you old duffer. You don't want to go grubbing along at ten bob a week — or was it tenpence a day? I forget. Promise me to do a picture for the next show, or I sha'n't feel easy in my mind about you."

"I promise," Matt murmured.

"That's right," said Herbert, considerably relieved. He went on heartily: "The Academy is the stepping-stone. It's no good kicking it out of the way. Put a picture in the Academy, by fair means if thou canst, but—put a picture in the Academy. You see, even Cornpepper had to come to us. And even if you *will* do new-fangled stuff, you can always get in if you make the picture a certain queer size—just to fit an awkward corner. I forget the exact measurements, but the Old Gentleman knows; he took care to find out in case I couldn't get in legitimately. I'll make a point of asking him. Poor old governor! I don't suppose he'll sleep to-night. Why, he was quite blubbery when the cab drove off. Do you know, there's a certain pathos about the Old Gentleman."

"He's been very good to you," said Matt.

"Well, and now he is happy. Virtue rewarded. The cream of the joke is that now I've got to go abroad in spite of him—travelling studentship, you see — and he can't possibly chuck business for a year to come with me."

"Was the money in that envelope?" Matt asked.

"Only the first quarterly instalment. What a shame I can't pay you out of that! Only I must study abroad with the money. It wouldn't be honest to use it for any other purpose, would it?"

"Don't talk of it," said Matt, flushing from a sense of the misconstruction of his thoughtless query.

"Oh, don't be so shocked. You look as if I had already misappropriated it. I can't tell you how glad I was to see your dear old phiz to-night. What have you been doing with yourself? I often wondered why you didn't look me up at the club. By-the-way, here we are at the club."

"Here?" echoed Matt, interrogatively. They had been walking automatically as they conversed, and had come to a standstill before a blank, cheerless building in Golden Square.

"Yes, this is the shanty. Not *my* club, you duffer. This is only the students' little ken. I told my people the truth, you know. It *would* be snobbish not to drop in to-night. They make rather a night of it, though I hadn't intended to go otherwise. Hang it all, I had an appointment to sup with a girl at half-past ten! I forgot all about her—she'll be mad." He took out his watch. "Ten past eleven. Why, Ecclesiastical Art must have evolved till close on eleven! It isn't my fault, anyhow. Do you mind trotting round to the Imperial? She's in the first ballet. We'd better have a hansom."

The young men drove round to the stage door, but the fair one had departed after a few impatient instants. "I think I heard her tell the cabby 'Rule's,'" was the sixpennyworth of information obtained from the janitor.

"Let's go there," said Matt, who was now quite faint with hunger, and who had a lurking wish that Herbert would stand a supper — one of the olden heroic suppers that he had not tasted for half a year — a wild riot of a supper, with real meat and wholesome vegetables and goodly sauces — nay, even red wine, and a crowning cup of coffee made of real beans, not the charred crust of over-baked loaves, out of which he had been making his own lately; getting the burned bread cheaper with a double economy; a supper fit for well-fed gods, which a starving man having eaten might be well content to die. But Herbert, unaware of what was going on in Matt's inner man, replied, cruelly, "No, it's too late to look for her at the restaurant. I know her address, but she won't be there yet. Besides, I ought to show up at the club."

So they strolled back to the bleak building (Matt suddenly bethinking himself that even here supper might lie in wait), and passing through a dark hall, mounted a stone corkscrew staircase that led to a hubbub of voices and a piano jingling music-hall tunes. The doorway of the first room was congested by black backs over-circled with clouds of smoke. Herbert and Matt peered in unseen for a few moments. The little room, decorated only by a few sketches from the hands of members, and separated from the second room by the primitive partition of a screen, was crowded with young men in evening dress sitting round on chairs or knees or coal-scuttles, with glasses in their hands and cigars in their mouths, and new men were squeezing in from the inner room, the advent of each being greeted by facetious cheers. Plaudits more genuine in their ring welcomed Flinders, who, it was understood, had been in the final running. He came in, trying to make his naturally long face look short, and exclaiming with punctilious carelessness, "Where's my whiskey?" Rands, who, it was whispered, had lost by only a few votes, was not present; he had, apparently, gone home to the heart-broken gentility at Dalston. Matt caught sight of Cornpepper on the right of the doorway, and his heart rejoiced as at the sight of a laid supper. The little painter was clutching the middle of his chair with his most owl-like expression. His single eye-glass glittered in the gaslight.

"Why, there's Cornpepper!" Matt whispered, in awed accents.

"Oh, has he come in?" yawned Herbert. "I saw him marching Greme about among the Daniels, and giving them hell in emulation of Clinch—looking round after every swear, as if half hoping the ladies hadn't heard him, and half hoping they had." But Matt had only half heard Herbert. He was listening to the oracles of Cornpepper. But listeners rarely hear any good of themselves.

"Strang's not in it with you," Cornpepper was saying to Flinders. "There's no blooming style in his technique. It might have been done by an R.A."

"They do say the result would have been very different if

more R.A.'s had come down," said the semi-consoled Flinders, somewhat illogically. "But Barbauld had the gout, and Platt is in Morocco, and—"

At this point shouts of "Strang!" made the cousins start, but it was only the playfulness of the room greeting a new-comer as the victor. The youth acquiesced humorously in the make-believe, slouching round the room with a comical shuffle and a bow to each chair. Then a man got up and began a burlesque lecture on Ecclesiastical Art "to my young architectural friends." Every reference to apses, groins, or gargoyles was received with yells of delight, a demoniac shriek being reserved for Albrecht Dürer.

"I'm awfully glad I escaped it," said a youth in front of Matt. "I got there five minutes late, and the man wouldn't let me in. At least he said, 'I'm not supposed to let you in after nine-fifteen.' But I didn't take the tip—or give it."

In the middle of the address on Art, Gurney, coming up the staircase in the wake of a student friend (to whom he had been descanting on the absurdities of Cornpepperism, from which he had now revolted), perceived Herbert, and pushed him boisterously into the room, which straightway became a pandemonium; the pianist banging "See, the Conquering Hero Comes," the boys stamping, singing, huzzahing, rattling their glasses, and shouting, "Cigars!" "Drinks!" "Strang!"

Herbert beamingly ordered boxes of Havanas and "soda-and-whiskies," and soon Matt, still in his overcoat, found himself drinking and smoking and shouting with the rest, exalted by the whiskey into forgetfulness of his clothes and his fortunes, and partaking in all the rollicking humors of the evening, in all the devil-may-care gayety of the eternal undergraduate, roaring with his boon companions over the improper stories of the ascetic-looking young man with the poetic head, bawling street choruses, dancing madly in grotesque congested waltzes, wherein he had the felicity to secure Cornpepper for a partner, and distinguishing himself in the high-kicking *pas seul*, not departing till the final "Auld Lang Syne" had been sung with joined hands in a wildly whirling ring. Herbert had left some time before.

"Good-night, Matt; I want to get away. I don't often get such an excuse for being out late. There's no need for you to go yet, you lucky beggar," he whispered, confidentially, as he sallied forth, radiantly sober, weaving joyous dreams of his travelling studentship future.

When the party broke up in the small hours, Matt Strang, saturated with whiskey and empty of victual, staggered along the frosty pavements, singing to the stars, that reeled round, blinking and winking like the buttons on Herbert's boots.

CHAPTER IX

DEFEAT

His own boots preoccupied Matt's attention ere the New Year dawned. Had "Four-toes" continued going to Grainger's, instead of letting his subscription lapse perforce with the Christmas quarter, he might have convinced the class that his toes were normal, for they had begun to peep out despite all his efforts to botch up the seams. The state of his wardrobe prevented him from looking up Herbert at his club, especially as he was doubtful whether the travelling studentship had not already carried his cousin off; and thus that mad night, which was a hot shame to sober memory, grew to seem an unreal nightmare, and Herbert as distant as ever.

A vagrant atom of the scum of the city, he tasted all the bitterness of a million-peopled solitude. His quest for work was the more hopeless the shabbier his appearance grew. In optimistic after-dinner moods he had thought the spectacle of the streets sufficient, and to feast one's eyes on the pageant of life a cloyless ecstasy; and, indeed, in the first days of his wanderings, the merest artistic touch in the wintry streets could still give him a pleasurable sensation that was a temporary anodyne—the yellow sand scattered on slippery days along the tram lines, and showing like a spilth of summer sunshine; the warm front of a public-house, making the only spot of color

in the long suburban street; strange faces seen for an instant in fog and lost forever; snow-flakes tumbling over one another in their haste, or fluttering lingeringly to earth; red suns, gray-ringed, like school-boys' taws—but, as the slow days unfolded their sordid unchanging coils, he found himself shrinking more and more into himself. He sought warmth and refuge from reality in the National Gallery or the British Museum, dreaming away the hours before the more imaginative pictures or the Elgin marbles. But even these failed him at last, their beauty an intolerable irony. Sometimes he realized with a miserable start the real tragedy of being "out of work," how it narrowed the horizon down to the prospect of meals, so that the great movement of the world from which he was shut out left him equally exclusive, and the announcements on the newspaper posters—wars and international football and the opening of parks and new plays and the deaths of great men and the rise of ministries—struck no responsive chord in his imagination, were all shadowy emanations from some unreal mockery of a universe. The real universe had his own navel for centre. Sometimes a faint perception of the humor of the position distorted his lips in a melancholy smile; he wondered how he would come out under Jimmy Raven's pencil. At other times he lay huddled up in his bed, his fading clothes heaped over the one blanket, passing the day in an apathetic trance, interrupted only by the intermittent working of his imagination, or by observation of optical effects that accidentally arrested his gaze; and the next day, in remorse for lost possibilities, he would rise before dawn, and recommence his search for employment.

From such a long day's tramp he was shuffling homeward late one dark, dismal night, when, pausing to warm his feet and hands at the cellar-grating of a baker's shop, he was accosted by William Gregson, striding along with a frown on his forehead and a brown-paper parcel in his hand.

"Hullo, Fourt—Strang!" he cried, pausing. "Don't see you any more."

"No," said Matt, wishing Gregson wouldn't see him now, and edging a little away from a street-lamp.

"You don't want any boots?"

"No," said Matt, sticking his toes downward to hide the gaps as far as possible.

"You won't forget I am at your service whatever you want," said the little stooping old man, with shining enthusiastic eyes. "It is a pleasure to work for a man with feet like yours. I was only thinkin' of you to-night at the studio—a scurvy wretch has been servin' me a shabby trick, and I was thinkin' to myself: Ah, Four—ah, Strang, there's a difference now! Strang's a man and a brother artist. This bloke's a 'artless biped."

"Why, what did he do?"

"There's no need to go into details," said William Gregson, pathetically. "Suffice it to say he refuses the boots. And here they are. A beautiful pair! Left on my hands! After I sat up half the night to finish 'em for him, trade's so brisk just now."

He unwrapped the package to expose their perfections.

"And what will you do with them?" said Matt.

"I'd like to put 'em on and kick him with 'em," replied Gregson, gloomily. "Only they're too small." Gregson's own feet were decidedly not beautiful.

"Yes, they seem more my size," agreed Matt.

"Will you have them?" cried the old man, eagerly. "Name your own price! Don't be afraid. I sha'n't ask more than last time."

But Matt shook his head. "I'm hard up," he confessed, blushing in the lamplight.

"I'll trust you," was the fervid response.

"I'd never pay you," Matt protested, "unless I could do something for you in return. If you want," he hesitated, "your shop painted, or any wall-papering, or—or I could build you a counter, or—"

But the shoemaker was shaking his head. "I don't want my shop painted—but 'ow if you painted me?" he cried, with an inspiration. "I've often tried to do it myself, but some'ow an angelic expression gets into it, and the missus don't recognize it. Have you ever tried doin' your own portrait, Strang?"

"No—not seriously," said Matt.

"Well, you try, and see if you don't find it as I say. It's

a curious thing how that angelic expression will creep in when a man's paintin' his own portrait. Besides, you can paint better than me; I don't say it behind your back, but—"

"Then it's a bargain?" interrupted Matt, anxiously.

"Yes; I can give you an hour every mornin'. Trade's so slack, unfortunately."

"May I take the boots with me?" inquired Matt.

"Yes, the moment the portrait's done," said Gregson, in generous accents.

"Are you afraid I'll walk off in 'em?" Matt cried, angrily. "And suppose they don't fit?"

"Ah, well; you may try them on," conceded Gregson. And, with a curious repetition of a former episode, Matt slipped off his boot under a street-lamp. The boots were a little tight, especially after the yawning laxness of the old; but it was heavenly to stamp on the wet pavement and to feel a solid sole under one's foot, even though an oozy, sloppy stocking intervened.

Gregson perceived the ruin of the vacant boot, and his face grew stern.

"Keep it on, keep it on," he said, harshly. "You're an old customer."

"Oh, thank you!" ejaculated Matt.

"You can give me the old pair," he rejoined, gruffly.

"Oh, but they're past mending," said Matt.

"But they can help to mend other boots. They're like clergymen," said the little shoemaker, laughing grimly. "Nothing is ever wasted in this world."

Matt was thinking so too, though from a different point of view. He was grateful to the economical order of the universe.

The boots reinvigorated the pilgrim on his way to the ever-receding Mecca of employment, and each day he sallied forth further refreshed by the bread and butter and tea which William Gregson's spouse dispensed after the sittings. All over London he tramped. One day he wandered in hopes of a job among the docks of Rotherhithe, feeling a vague romance in the great gray perspectives of towering wood-stacks with their far-away flavor of exotic forests, and in the sombre canals and

locks along which men with cordwain faces were tugging discolored barges. The desolation of the scene and of the district was akin to his mood—his eyes were full of delicious hopeless tears; he rambled on, forgetting to ask for the job, through the forlorn streets, all ship-chandler shops and one-story cottages, and threading a narrow passage strewn with lounging louts, found himself on a little floating pier on the bank of the river, and lost himself again in contemplating the grimy picturesque traffic, the bleak wharves and warehouses.

"You see that air barge with the brick-dust sails?"

Matt started; an aged gentleman with a rusty silk hat was addressing him.

"Well, t'other day I see one just like that capsize in calm weather under my very eyes. I come here every day after dinner to watch the water, and I do get something worth seein' sometimes. The pier-master he told me it was loaded with road-slop, and road-slop's alive—shifts the weight on the lurchin' side, you see, and that's 'ow it occurred. There was two men drowned—oh! it's worth while coming here sometimes, I can tell you. You see that green flag off the buoy?—that's where she lays, right in the fairway of the river."

Here the aged gentleman snuffed himself with tremulous fingers that spilled half, and offered Matt the box. The young man took a pinch for exhilaration.

A strayed sparrow hopped dolefully amid the grains of snuff on the floating platform in futile quest of seeds.

"It would be 'appier stuffed," the aged gentleman declared. "I mean with tow, not toke." And he laughed wheezingly.

Matt contesting this, the aged gentleman maintained, with an air of deep philosophy, that all birds would be 'appier stuffed—that their life in a state of nature was a harrowing competition for crumbs and worms, while to keep them alive in cages was the climax of cruelty.

It subsequently transpired that he was a retired bird-stuffer, and the conversation ended in Matt's accompanying him home to learn the process, as the bird-stuffer's son and heir in far-off Stepney was in need of a trustworthy hand in the shop.

"There isn't a honest 'art in the trade," he said, gloomily,

"and the boys are wuss than the men. They ought to be stuffed. What I like about you is that you've got no character. The better the character the wuss the man. They takes advantage of it."

Arrived at his house—which was more pretentious than most of its one-story neighbors—for it had a basement sublet to a blind woman whose insignia read, "Chairs neatly cained on reasonable terms," and its parlor window was gay with wax fruits and stuffed birds—the aged gentleman, who gave the name of Ground, discovered that he had no skin to operate on, and, being spent from the walk, directed Matt to buy a dead canary for sixpence from a bird-fancier "in the Eye Road."

"There's the tanner," he said. "Now if you don't come back with the bird you may stuff me for a old goose."

Matt came back with the bird, but the aged gentleman put it to his nose and contorted his aged snuff-colored nostrils.

"I want a bird, not manure," he said. "A bird fresh from this wale of tears. Why, if I began to skin this the feathers 'ould drop out. You've been took in, but you haven't took *me* in, so here's another tanner."

In great anxiety Matt stood outside the bird-fancier's shop-window, staring wistfully at the frowsy-looking birds roosting in the cages, and hoping that some kindly canary would drop off to eternal sleep under his very nose so that he might be sure of its freshness. But the poor little creatures all clung to existence and their perches. Suddenly he began to laugh. There was an owl in a cage, and it looked like Cornpepper. On its head was an erectile tuft like Cornpepper's hair after argument, and, though devoid of an eye-glass, the creature regarded him from its great feather-fringed eyes with the same large, profound gaze.

"Give me style," he heard it saying, "give me style."

And then he thought of Cornpepper's theories, of which he had heard more on that glad mad night when the juvenile celebrity had been his partner in the waltz.

"Erle-Smith is all wrong," Cornpepper had pronounced, testily. "But I don't want to talk shop to-night. Imagination is shown in treatment, not in subject. There may be more imag-

ination in the painting of a dressing-gown than of an allegory. Painters are called poets when they can't paint. And the *Saturday Spectator* is quite at sea when it claims me as the champion of modern subject against ancient, mediæval, or imaginary. Subject, indeed! What I demand is modern *treatment*. I do wish O'Brien would leave off interpreting me."

And Matt Strang fell into a reverie, wondering what he should paint for the Academy, and gazing into the owl's eyes. What if he were destined to waltz to fame in company with Cornpepper! And then he remembered Gurney's enthusiastic talk during the pauses of the wild waltz in denunciation of the "real moments" of Cornpepperism, and in acclamation of the simpler harmonies of Outamaro, the great Japanese master, from whose work Cornpepper's was a rotten retrogression rather than a legitimate evolution. Matt speculatively surrendered his fancy to Japanese images. A gallery of beautiful dream-pictures passed before his eyes like a panorama. A brusque tap on the shoulder roused him from his day-dream, and turning, he saw the animated face of the aged gentleman beneath the rusty silk hat.

"Where's the bloomin' bird?" cried Mr. Ground, relieved to find Matt not run off, for during the suspense of waiting it had struck him that even the first bird might have been picked up in the gutter.

"The bird," Matt murmured, dazedly. "Oh! Ah! I was waiting for one to die. I wanted to be sure it was—new."

"With my little eye, I sore 'im die," quoted the aged gentleman, mockingly. "'Ere, give us the cash—you're a juggins. But I suppose folks can't be honest and clever too."

He took the sixpence and went inside, and re-emerged with what he called a "new-laid" linnet, and returning to his parlor, skinned it, and smeared the skin with arsenical soap, which he manufactured on the spot out of common yellow soap beaten up into a batter with water, white arsenic, and some drops of toothache mixture he had in a vial. He stuffed the skin with the cotton-wool in which the vial was embedded, and ran a wire right through from mouth to tail, with half a hair-pin for each leg and each wing.

"I'm out of eyes," he said, pausing. "But in them sockets you sticks glass eyes—they're so much a dozen, according to size. See?"

Matt's aptitude as a pupil regained him the aged gentleman's esteem, and a day or so after the oddly assorted couple sailed down the Thames on a penny steamboat, and walked from Blackwall to Stepney, where Matt was introduced to the bird-stuffer's son, a fat, greasy, hilarious man, who told his father that he was "a old innercent," and facetiously argued out the probabilities of Matt's honesty in Matt's presence. Ultimately, Ground Junior took the young man on a week's trial. The trial going in Matt's favor, he was installed permanently in the establishment at eighteen shillings a week, fulfilling miscellaneous functions, the most troublesome of which was the superintendence of a snub-nosed errand-boy, who played excruciatingly on a penny whistle. This boy, whose name was Tommy, and who reminded Matt queerly of his ancient Indian chum by his dishonesty as well as by his name, would calmly return with bare pedestals where there had been birds and shades, and assert that he had smashed the glass, and that thieves in the crowd had torn off the birds. He did not flinch from smashing whole nests of glass shades, two dozen inside one another, a veritable Napoleon among errand-boys. Sometimes, when he had been out with the barrow delivering orders, he would wheel it home laden with mysterious coats and boots, which he vainly offered Matt on easy terms. At irregular intervals, too, he fell ill, a note from his mother arriving in his handwriting differently sloped, and then Matt was reduced to trundling the barrow himself, while the fat facetious man, summoned from the workroom over the shop, or from his other establishment in the New Cut, where his wiry vixen of a wife had her headquarters, replaced him behind the counter. Matt had also spells of mechanical occupation in the workshop. He not only stuffed the skins (which came from abroad), but arranged baskets of wax-fruit (which were bought ready-made) and paper flowers and cases of shells with moss and sea-weeds and pyramids of pebbles. And he made mock red coral out of balls of brown paper, dipped into a hot composition of beeswax and rosin,

and stuck it on wooden stands with many-hued shells variegating it, and preserved insects creeping prettily over it; likewise he manufactured wax-flowers to replace breakages; hollow frauds, mere wax shells pounced with dry colors, or mixed originally with coloring matter, yellow ochre making apples, and lake lending transparency to cherries, or uniting with Prussian blue to furnish the florid richness of purple grapes.

But though—as ever—his taskwork hovered oddly about the purlieus of Art, or the vaults of its Temple, and though his eighteen shillings a week enabled him to send nine shillings a week home, in monthly instalments, to Abner Preep, still he was not happy. The difficulties with the errand-boy; the fat facetiousness of Ground Junior; the menial trundling of the barrow, with the dread of some day meeting "Bubbles," or other fellows from Grainger's, to say nothing of Cornpepper, Gurney, Rapper, or the Old Gentleman; the retail trade over the counter, the biweekly task of cleaning all the shades with a chamois leather—all this, combined with the sense of wasted months, galled and fretted him. He was working at his Academy picture now—in accordance with his promise to Herbert—but his hours being from eight to eight, Sunday was his only leisure time, and he was paradoxically grateful for the ancient Oriental ordinance which made the godless British bird-stuffer close his shop once a week and thus enable him to work. He was able to do some of the preliminary sketching-out in the early morning and at night; but there was no light for the real work, nor was there much light in his back bedroom, even at noon on Sundays.

He had not changed his address, though he had to walk three miles to and from his work; kept to his old lodging by habit and the trust that his landlady—an artist's mother—would not hastily throw him upon the streets. The subject of his picture had grown upon him from his daily occupation; the simulated bird-life around him moved him at moments to thoughts of the joyous winged creatures butchered to make a parlor ornament. He could not agree with Ground Senior that they were happier stuffed. And then, too, the pathos of prisoned birds would overwhelm him, exiled from their natural

woodland home, and set to peck endlessly at wires. His own lot and theirs became subtly interlinked, and his imagination, turning from the sordid prose of the actual world in which he found himself, brooded on visions of poetry and idyllic happiness, and so, instead of selecting from reality that which was beautiful in it, instead of following Cornpepper's theories, or his own theories, or anybody's theories, he found himself irresistibly and instinctively seized and possessed by a subject and a mode of treatment uncompromisingly imaginative—"The Paradise of the Birds," a beautiful wood, suffused with a magic sunlight, in which freed birds of many species should flutter blithely around a divine female figure with a wondrous radiance of love and joy upon her welcoming face, and at her feet a beautiful boy playing upon an oaten pipe. There should be an undertone of tender pathos—the pathos of birds—but light and joy were to be the essence of this harmony of lovely forms and colors; all the painter's semi-unconscious yearning for happiness, all his revolt against his narrow, squalid lot, his secret, resentful sense of the high place denied him at the banquet of life, reflecting themselves, inverted, in the mirror of his art. And though the sunlight and atmosphere should be real enough to satisfy the Cornpepper faction, yet over all he would put something of Erle-Smith's glamour:—

> "The gleam,
> The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration and the poet's dream."

For the paradise Matt drew on his recollections and old sketches of Acadia, supplemented by a few water-color studies made in Epping Forest, which was within difficult walking distance of the bird-shop, from which, of course, he got his birds; the divine female figure was based upon his first study from the nude at Grainger's, which he still possessed, though he now gave the woman the normal allowance of toes; while by the aid of coppers he bribed the snub-nosed apprentice with his penny whistle to sit for the cherub with the oaten reed. And thus was Nature transfigured to Art. But as Eden to Epping,

so was Matt's mental conception of the picture to the real picture.

From dawn to sunset Matt painted tirelessly, and with many patient effacements and substitutions of passages, during his one working-day, convinced that the Academy was now his only avenue to recognition; and as sending-in day drew nearer, and the precious light was born earlier, he was able to snatch an hour or two every morning before setting out for Stepney. Towards the end the need of time drove him to the omnibus.

Nor was it only the need of time. Of late a strange languor had grown upon him, against which he was incessantly battling. The image in his strip of glass frightened him; his face was white, his once sturdy frame thin, and so feeble was he become that the three-mile walk, which had been rather a pleasure than an inconvenience, was now a weary, endless drag. He had bilious headaches. But he toiled on at his picture, finding in the fairyland of imagination consolation for existence, and in the anxieties and agonies of artistic travail an antidote to the agonies and anxieties of the daily grind. "The Paradise of the Birds," though he was conscious it did not equal his conception, still seemed to him far superior to the ordinary Academy picture; it could not fail to redeem him from his own Inferno, reveal him to the world, make him an honored guest in artistic coteries, and give him all the day for Art. Through the sordid life of Stepney and Whitechapel he moved, sustained by an inner vision of beauty and victory, and it was not till he had surreptitiously wheeled his picture to Burlington House in the bird-stuffer's barrow, at the price of a reprimand for idling about, that his will-power gave way, and he realized that he was but a limp shadow. Hope kept him on his feet a little longer, but the terrifying symptoms developed rapidly, and at last even Ground Junior perceived his condition, and allowed him a morning's leave to attend a hospital. For two hours and a half he waited on one of the bare benches of a cheerless, dim-lit anteroom amid a grimy crowd of invalids, ranging from decrepit, bandaged old men to wan-faced children, all coughing and groaning and conversing fatuously, and ostentatiously comparing complaints, and finally fading away

tediously two by two into the presence of the physician. At last his own turn came, announced by the sharp ting of a hand-bell; and, preceded by a rheumy-eyed stone-mason, he passed through the polished, awe-inspiring portal, and found himself in the presence of an austere gentleman with frosty side-whiskers.

"What's the matter with you, my man?" the doctor inquired in low tones of the stone-mason.

"All outer sorts," replied the stone-mason.

"Ah! Any special pain anywhere?" he went on, in the same dulcet accents.

"Eh?" asked the stone-mason, hearing imperfectly in his fluster.

The doctor shouted in a mighty yell: "Any special pain anywhere?"

The appalled stone-mason admitted to a stitch in the side, and the doctor continued his interrogative thunders. He had only two conversational methods—the piano and the fortissimo.

Matt, trembling, awaited his succession to the criminal dock, and, straining his ears when the trying moment came, was fortunate enough to secure the piano treatment.

"Your blood is poisoned," was the great man's verdict. "This is the third case I have had from bird-stuffing establishments. When you clean the glass shades and breathe on the insides you imbibe the arsenical and other foul gases that are given off by the skins and collect inside the air-tight glasses. You will take the medicine three times a day, but it won't do you any good if you go on living in that atmosphere. You want sea-air. You ought to try and get into the country, and have a little holiday."

And Matt Strang, dazed, but smiling grimly, crawled down into the dispensary and handed in his prescription, and tottered back to the bird-shop with a big bottle of yellow fluid in his hand. He would not let himself think; there was only one point of light—his Academy picture—and he kept his eyes fixed on that as on a star.

A few days later the notice of rejection arrived, and the thin, sickly faced young man, being out with orders, surreptitiously

wheeled "The Paradise of the Birds" home on his barrow, and discounted the renewed wrath of his employer by giving a week's notice. He did his work as usual that afternoon, smiling in uneasy defiance at the oddly intrusive thought that the Cobequid folks would have said it was all through his painting on Sundays, yet not without a shred of their superstition. But when he got home he fell helplessly on his little iron bed, and wept like a child.

He was beaten, broken, shattered in body and soul. He had fought and lost.

And as an ailing child turns yearningly to its mother, so his heart yearned to his native land in a great surge of homesickness. Here the narrow labyrinthine streets were muddy with spring rains, but there the snow would still be on the fields and forests, white and pure and beautiful under the dazzling blue sky. Oh, the keen, tingling cold, the large embrace of the salt breezes, the joy of skating over the frozen flats! His poor poisoned blood glowed at the thought. Here he was ill and lonely, there he would be among loving faces. Poor Billy! How the boy must long for him! It would be humiliating to return a failure, but there would be none to reproach him, and his own pride was gone, vanished with his physical strength. But how to get back? He was too ill to go before the mast, too impoverished to command even the steerage. He had unfortunately sent thirty-six shillings home just before the rejection of his picture, and he was again in arrears of rent, through the extra expense of the canvas and the compulsory gilt frame. Mrs. Lipchild was induced by the splendor of the frame to take "The Paradise of the Birds" in payment for the three weeks (lunar), and the "carver and gilder, over-mantel and picture-frame maker" in Red Lion Street, who had made the frame, purchased all his remaining pictures and school-studies for a sovereign down.

There was nothing for it but to borrow. So feeble was his whole being that the first suggestion of this ignominy carried no sting. He thought first of Herbert, and brushing his garments to a threadbare specklessness, inquired of his club door-keeper, who informed him curtly that Mr. Strang was abroad. This

was as he expected, but he was disappointed. Tarmigan was his only other friend, but him he had lost sight of since Christmas, and though he had in these hours of weakness abandoned the hope of Art, he had still a vague paradoxical aversion from applying to a man whose artistic ideas he did not share, and who might hereafter have a sort of right to resent his departure from them. Besides, Tarmigan was poor, was unsuccessful. In his desperation he thought of Madame Strang, and though, in the course of their chat that night at the Students' Club, Herbert had told him the Old Gentleman had given her an awful wigging, and she had renewed her promise to close her door in the culprit's face, yet Matt nerved himself to risk insult. So, spying the shop from a sheltered doorway across the street, he hung about till the Vandyke beard and the velvet jacket had issued and disappeared round a corner, then he rang the bell of the side door, and to his joy Madame herself opened it.

"My poor boy! What is the matter with you?" she cried.

The unexpected sympathy of her words clouded the lonely young man's gaze with hot tears; he staggered into the passage, and Madame, growing pale herself, took him by the arm and helped him into the sitting-room, and in her agitation poured him out a whole tumblerful of brandy, which fortunately he only sipped.

A little recovered, he explained—improving his pallid complexion with blushes when he came to the point—that he was returning to Nova Scotia, as the doctor had ordered him a sea-voyage, and he wanted four or five pounds till he got to the other side, when he would easily be able to repay the loan.

"Certainly, my poor boy, certainly," said Madame. "The idea of clever people having no money, and people like me having plenty."

She ran up-stairs, and returned with ten of the sovereigns, that she hoarded—literally—in her stocking.

But Matt would not take more than five. He felt it foolish to burden himself with superfluous temptations.

"I knew you weren't a rogue," cried Madame, in thoughtless triumph. The sentiment reminding her of the interrogative

eyebrows, she added, hastily, "Of course, you won't tell my husband. Not that he would mind, of course, for I am helping you to leave the country. But oh, how I wish you had come to me instead of to Herbert! The dear boy has such hard work and so few pleasures, and his allowance is so small that his father was naturally annoyed to think of your making the poor boy stint himself. Of course, I made it up to Herbert unbeknown to his father, who would only return him a little of the money you had borrowed. Promise me you will not apply to Herbert again. You know it is so expensive living in Paris!"

"I promise," Matt murmured, hardly conscious of what Madame was saying, his soul already in Nova Scotia, and dissolved in tenderness and gratitude. The prospect of leaving London was as delightful as the prospect of coming to it had been not fifteen months ago.

Ere he bade her farewell Madame made him promise to come and see her when he was back in London again, hoped the voyage would do him good, and scolded him for never having shown her his pictures.

"I am sure you will be a great artist," she said, smiling winsomely. "You have the artistic hand. God bless you."

The young man listened unmoved; he was hoping the ice would bear till he arrived in Cobequid Village.

And so, with all his worldly goods, including the unsaleable "Angelus," packed in the smallest of satchels, Matt Strang sailed back across the Atlantic, the blood clogged in his veins, an unregarded unit of the countless myriads that London has allured and scorched.

CHAPTER X

MATT RECEIVES SUNDRY HOSPITALITIES

But the prodigal son was not fated to see any of his relatives immediately upon his return to his native land except his mother, and this was scarcely his mother, this pale creature with eyes vacant of all save tears, who babbled to him, with heart-rending

verbal repetitions, of Revelation and the Beast, not even mistaking him for his dead father. She had survived her life.

From Halifax Matt did not proceed forthwith to Cobequid Village, joining, instead, a crew of mackerel-fishers, in the hope of earning enough to repay Madame Strang immediately; for his soul, reinvigorated by the sea-breezes of the voyage and the skies of his childhood, had returned to its healthy repugnance to debt, and was ashamed of its lapse.

It was a mixed company that he sailed away with—the bulk decent Nova Scotians, of old fisher stock, but some rougher and more casual, and a few—though these were harmless enough—despised "Portigees." The fishing was not devoid of danger. The men had to row out from the schooner in twos or threes to tend the nets spread on the mackerel banks, and sometimes a fog would come on and ingulf the ship, and the fishers with their mocking freight would row for hours and hours, and at times for days and days, on the ghostly sea in search of their floating home. And sometimes they, too, would be swallowed up in the mystery of sea and fog, and wives and mothers, running anxiously to the wharf to meet them, would learn that an older fisher had netted his prey.

To Matt the hard work and the peril were alike welcome; the very mists were poetry after the yellow charnel-house vapors of London, which now lay behind him like a nightmare, and with it his dream of Art. His soul had swung round violently. In the strain of hauling up the nets in the misty moonlight, in the silence of sea and sky and night, he found repose from his morbid craving to reproduce this mighty Nature, which stretched away all around him in large, sane serenity, as indifferent to the puny images of Art as the waste of waters to the little dory rocking on its bosom. And the rugged simplicity of his briny, horny-handed mates was equally restful after the garish brilliance of the young artists about town; after all, his heart was with homely folk, went out to sea-folk; he was his father's son and the brother of all those who go down to the sea in ships and do business in the great waters. How like a child's cackle Corn-pepper's epigrams sounded across the silence of the lonely deep! Under the hushed stars, touching the infinite spaces with awful

beauty, all these feverish figures of the smoking-room showed like fretful midges.

When the cruise was over, and the spoil had been unloaded and sold on the fishy wharf, or steeped in brine and packed in the vats, Matt was able to send ten dollars to England, besides keeping up his usual allowance to Cobequid Village and maintaining himself—a triple task which weighed heavily upon his brain, and gave him frequent moments of corroding, nervous apprehension. For his health was only partially re-established, and his correspondence with Cobequid Village was not reassuring. His brothers and sisters were growing up without finding much to do; Billy moped a great deal, and though he thanked his brother for the engraving of the "Angelus," which Matt sent him, he intimated that he would have been better pleased had Matt spent his money on books of travel and adventure for him. And Abner wrote, with pathetic facetiousness, that he was "tolerable pleased" that his brother-in-law had not come home, as they would have been "mighty squeezed" to put him up, for, what with the increase of Abner's own progeny and the growth of the Strangs, even the best room with the cane chairs had long since been turned into a bedroom, though it could still be restored to its pristine magnificence on state occasions.

From the neighboring fishing-ground Matt gravitated back to Halifax. His thoughts, divorced from Art, centred on money. His artistic fibre was coarser now than in those days of almost religious enthusiasm for Art. He had an idea of opening a drawing-school and becoming the local "Grainger," but the initial funds were to seek. He got a few drawing-lessons, but the stupidity of his pupils was maddening, and his communion with their parents fretted him after the larger mind of London. He feared he would have to take to the road again in search of sitters, and the prospect of weary tramps in quest of patronizing store-keepers and farmers was not alluring, even though that fine squeamish horror at the idea of Art to order had been knocked out of him. He was saved from the tramping by becoming assistant in a photographic caravan, which toured the country, leaving in each village a trail of attitudinizing inhabitants mounted and framed; in the course of which campaign, by a

pleasanter stroke of fortune, he painted the portraits of a minister of fisheries and of the cook he had married, and so gained enough money to quit the caravan and start a carriage-painting shop in the village where the happy couple had their country home. As the poorest inhabitants were carriage-folk — for horses and oats and hay were cheap, and carriage taxes unknown—Matt Strang, with a commercial instinct sharpened and an artistic interest blunted by miseries, calculated to do well. His sign-board, executed by his own hand, ran :

CARRIAGES PAINTED,
ALSO SLEIGHS.
HOUSE DECORATING, PORTRAITS, AND
DRAWING-LESSONS.

The shop was a success. Ere the summer waned many of the villagers had their idle sleighs brilliantly illumined, and when winter came their faded carriages were handed over to Matt to be berouged or otherwise beautified. Each man had his equipage decorated after his own taste or whim, though he always began by leaving it entirely to the artist. One would order lemon-yellow underworks, with vermilion stripes and an olive-green body, for another the ideal of beauty lay in lake and russet-and-green, while the fancy of a third would turn lightly to Prussian blue and gold stripes ; and Matt, devoid now of artistic interest and thus of artistic irritability, faithfully obeyed the behests of his employers, and filled the leafy streets with a riotous motley of perambulating color. The little village was pranked and rejuvenated. It wore a sempiternally festive air. The sign-boards were spick-and-span, the house fronts fresh and bright, the vehicles gayly a-glitter, the glass windows of the stores black with self-laudatory lettering by day, while at night the buff store-blinds repeated the brag ; and over all the village was a sense of " wet paint." Thus did the artist throw a glamour over life, and touch the sleeping souls of his fellows to livelier issues,

though his own interest in Art was numb. But prices were small, and paid mainly in kind, and when once the place was transmogrified there was nothing further to be done, the latter items of his sign-board evoking no response. So Matt shifted his ensign to Starsborough, a ship-building village on the coast, where he found new scope for his versatile craftsmanship, as witness two new items added to his painted prospectus:—

FIGURE-HEADS CARVED.

SHIP DECORATING.

He got leave to set up in the ship-yard, speculated in a set of carving-tools, and supplied the prows of the ships with those picturesque wooden persons whose uselessness is of the essence of Art. He occupied a corner in the calker's shop, reeking with tarry odors, and worked hemmed in by the oakum-pickers, who relieved the tedium of toil by smoking and singing lewd songs. One of his works, a Turkish lady eight feet high, to get which done in time cost him much sweat and sacrifice of other work, pleased the ship-builder so vastly that he gave Matt the contract—in preference to all the other candidates who sent in estimates—for painting his next ship within and without. The delighted young man saw his way to speedy competence, the long-torpid thought of Art began to stir drowsily, only it was Paris that now gleamed fitfully in the background of his day-dreams. He talked over the decorations with the ship-builder, and agreed to pay the men from week to week, and to supply the tools, paints, and gold-leaf till the job was completed, when his employer undertook to pay him the sum agreed upon in actual coin. As Matt was able to get the materials from a store on three months' credit, and to pay his men with orders on the same all-embracing store on the same terms, and the job would be finished in less than three months, the arrangement promised to be very profitable. Alas! it proved the crash and break-down of all his new prosperity. In the middle of the work the ship-builder failed heavily, and Matt found himself on the point of bankruptcy too, for, though he sent in his claim against the estate, there seemed scant chance of his obtaining

anything. Even the Turkish woman had not been paid for, Matt having consented to receive her price with the rest of the money, for the sake of getting silver in lieu of goods. His account with the store-keeper had run up to $250. He could not see how to meet his bills; the weeks without other work had exhausted his savings; there was even about a fourth of his debt still to be sent to Madame Strang. He got other little jobs, but the great shipwright's failure had reduced Starsborough to stagnation. The time of payment drew nigh. After sleepless nights of anguish he went to the store-keeper and told him he could not pay. The man received him sympathetically, said he had been expecting the confession, and consented to give him a little time; so Matt broke up his establishment, and journeyed by train and packet to another village nearer Halifax, and set up his sign-board afresh. A job took him to the capital, and in the streets he ran across his Starsborough creditor, who was come up to order hardware, and who, apparently delighted to see him, invited him to breakfast with him at his hotel next morning. Always glad to save a meal, and rejoiced to find his creditor so genial and debonair, Matt tramped into town the first thing in the morning and repaired to the hotel. But there was no breakfast for him. A sheriff's officer awaited him instead, and arrested him for debt. He had been the victim of a subterfuge, his creditor fearing from his migratory movements that he was about to run off to the States.

And so Matt was clapped into the prison to await his trial, and became one of the broken-down band that inhabited its spacious ward, promenaded the long whitewashed corridor on which the lavatory gave, and slept on the iron beds ranged against the wall. Every morning the bedclothes were stripped off and piled in the empty cells to give the ward a more habitable air. In this dreary bed and sitting room Matt spent days of mental agony, though physically he fared better than under his own parsimonious *régime*. But the sense of degradation outweighed all else. He felt he could never look his fellow-men in the face again. His character was gone; his ambitions had received their death-blow—nay, his very business career in his native land was at an end. The stigma would always soil his

future. All the long travail and aspiration had ended at what a goal! He could not understand the careless merriment of his fellow-prisoners, who fleeted the time with cards, which they played for love. There was a negro among them who was the whetstone of their wit, and a Frenchman who varied his tearful narrative of the misfortune that had brought him low, with ventriloquial performances and anecdotes of self-made Yankee millionaires. In this gesticulating little man Matt recognized with surprise and shamefacedness his ancient fractious subordinate in the Halifax furniture shop, who had taken him to his bosom after due alcohol, but he was glad to find his unconscious fellow made no advances. At moments he forced himself to look for the comic Bohemian side of the situation, to imagine Cornpepper's superiority to a debtors' prison, the artist sublime amid the ruins of his credit, snorting disdain for the absurd institutions of the bourgeois; but neither this nor philosophy availed to shake his sense of shame. He summoned the infinite to his aid, saw himself again rocking on the little dory between sea and sky, and asked himself what anything mattered in this vast of space and time. But these excursions of the intellect left instinct unmoved; from childhood the word "jail" had been fraught with shuddering associations; they could not be argued away. Strang's aloofness from his companions, even when an outside friend had sent in liquor or dainties to one of them, attracted the notice of the jailer, a kindly man in a cutaway coat, with only an official cap to mark his calling. He talked to the sullen, brooding prisoner, conceived a liking for him, and commissioned him to paint his portrait for ten dollars, supplying the materials himself and providing a temporary easel. The darkness that had threatened Matt's reason, if not his life, fled before this kindness; the days before the trial flew by almost joyously, and the nights were rendered more tolerable by being passed alone on a plank bed in one of the criminal cells, whose stout doors, studded with iron nails and furnished with little gratings, rarely held anybody, so that the painter easily persuaded his patron to allow him to occupy it.

He had scarcely set up his easel when his companions clustered round, and the Frenchman burst into tears of emotion, and

professed that he, too—he who spoke to you—was an artist. If only some one could see the creditor who had thrown him into prison, and explain to him that his victim was guiltless of all save genius. As Matt had heard all this before, he pursued his work unmoved, affording a new distraction to his mates, so that the negro's life became endurable, and less love was lost at cards. But ere the second sitting was over the Frenchman, who had studied alternately the artist's face and his canvas, uttered an exclamation of joyous recollection and fell upon his neck, crying that he had at last found again the comrade of his soul. When Matt had shaken him off, he drew a romantic picture of their early affection and collaboration for the edification of the salon, and henceforth took a proud fraternal interest in the progress of the portrait.

The picture turned out better than Matt had expected; to his own surprise he found himself painting more vigorously than ever; his hand, instead of having lost its cunning, seemed to have gained by the rest. The jailer was well content, and promised two and a half dollars over and above the price; but as Matt had expressed his intention of sending the money to his creditor, his new friend held over the surplus till he should need it for himself. When at the end of the third week the trial came on, and Matt "swore out," solemnly asserting absolute impecuniosity, his creditor, mollified by the ten dollars, and further assuaged by the sale of Matt's effects, from his tools to his sign-board, did not press the counter-proof of competency, and so the prisoner was set at liberty. Sundry other bankrupts "swore out" at the same time, one or two, who had boasted privily of their means, perjuring themselves back to freedom and prosperity.

Before Matt Strang bade farewell to the jail, the Frenchman broke off a ventriloquial performance to beseech him with tears in the name of the *camaraderie* of Art, and for the sake of their ancient affection, now that he was going forth into the free sunshine, to expostulate with that cruel creditor and plead for unhappy genius. The persecutor — Coble by name — would not listen to his own appeals; but if a brother-artist would speak for him, Coble's better nature—and every man had a better nature

—might be touched, and the skylark might soar freely again towards the blue empyrean. He was quite honest—oh, Heaven, yes! He did not really possess two hundred dollars, as Coble imagined, but he could not account for them before the court—one would see why—though privately he could account for them in a way that would satisfy every honest man. Some emissary of Satan had put a bill into his hand which said, "For a hundred dollars we will give you a thousand dollars of our goods." He had hankered, as any man might, after those thousand dollars, and sought out the coiners (for all the world knew that was their formula), and paid his hundred dollars. But the bag of coin they had given him was snatched from him on his road back by one of their agents. Determined not to be outwitted, he had gone again and invested another hundred dollars, and posted the parcel to himself at a neighboring post-office, but when it arrived he had found only a brick-bat inside. He had been afraid to "swear out" lest Coble should maintain he had the money, and thus get him indicted for perjury.

If the friend of his youth would lay these facts before the cruel Coble, he would no longer languish in a dungeon. Would not the great artist promise him?

The story seemed too strange to be false, and Matt promised, at the risk of a kiss, to recount it to the cruel Coble, though he failed to see how it proved the Frenchman's honesty. He was, indeed, not sorry to have something definite to do, for with the completion of the jailer's portrait had come a reaction, and he had lapsed, if not into his first agony, into a listless apathy that was worse—the nerveless, purposeless inertia of a crushed spirit. He had been in jail! Not even a miracle could erase that blot upon his name. How could he take up the burden of life afresh? Unless, perhaps, temporarily, with the sole object of wiping off the debt which he owed morally, though no longer legally. Anyway, he would see this Mr. Coble; the Frenchman seemed—curiously enough—to attach value to life, and if a little bit of his own life could be of any use to the poor weak creature, it was at his disposal. Mr. Coble, too, must be a strange person to derive any satisfaction from keeping the pygmy in prison in revenge for the loss of a few hundred dollars.

Money! Money! Money! How it had cramped and crippled and defiled his life!

He washed himself in the lavatory before leaving, and brushed his clothes, which were in a very fair condition. He was startled to find how many gray hairs streaked the curly locks he combed. "It won't be a monochrome much longer," he thought, surveying his mane with bitter merriment.

Outside it was May, but he was not brightened by the great blue sky that roofed him once more. The bustle of life sounded pleasantly about him, but he slunk through the busy quarters of the town with hanging head, as if every passer-by could read his shame in his face. The horrible thought struck him suddenly that Coble would know whence he came, but on top of it came the happy idea of explaining he had only gone to the jail to paint the portrait of an official.

The journey was not very long, though the road was muddy and steep. Mr. Coble lived beyond Citadel Hill, amid whose grassy expanse a path wound towards the more scattered portions of the town. The ice was quite off the sunny fields, except in the shaded parts under the fences, and men were ploughing with yokes of oxen, though here and there heaped-up piles of snow still bordered the route, which they flooded with slush in their gradual deliquescence. Mr. Coble's suburban residence was a detached, double-fronted wooden cottage, barred from the road by a neat, white-painted picket-fence. There were attics in the roof, which, like its neighbors, was pitched, with broad eaves, for the sliding down of the snow. The front garden had been newly dug up and laid out to receive seed; there was a dirty line round the house, showing where the winter embanking had recently been removed.

Matt pushed open the white picket garden-gate and walked up the gravel path towards the pillared porch; three wooden steps led to the little platform, and then the door was raised one step higher to prevent snow drifting in from without.

Matt knocked. He heard the inner door open, the patter of light footsteps; then the outer door swung back, and a girl—passably pretty—appeared in the little entry between the doors, which were thus duplicated against the frost.

Matt lifted his hat and inquired for Mr. Coble. He had reverted to the drawling accents of the colony, though not altogether to its locutions.

"Oh, pa's down at the store," answered the girl, staring at the visitor.

"When will he be in?" Matt asked, disappointed.

"Oh, not for hours," said Miss Coble. "Is it anything I can tell him?"

"No, no; I don't think so," Matt replied, hesitatingly. "I had better call again this evening."

The girl lingered silently without closing the door. There was a perceptible pause.

"Yes," she answered, at last. "I guess you had."

He raised his hat again and went down the gravel path. At the garden-gate it struck him that he ought to have inquired the address of the store in town, and so saved a second journey. He turned his head, and saw the girl still at the door looking after him. Then it seemed funny to go back.

He shut the gate hastily and pursued his way to town down the muddy road, wondering what he would do next, and how he could cope with life. The thought of the Frenchman brought up the memory of that furniture warehouse in which they had worked together in the days of his boyish dreams. He bent his steps towards it with a vague thought of seeking work there again, but found it had been converted into an emporium for sewing-machines. As he sauntered aimlessly down the street, his eye was caught by a lurid picture in a store window. It represented a shark snapping savagely at a diver upon the bed of the ocean. He smiled at the crude composition, which reminded him of his own early works; then, as he perceived its relation to the stock-in-trade, his smile became broader. Sponge was the staple, and a gigantic delicate sponge, with ornamental spout-holes and fragments of rock adhering realistically to it, was a conspicuous object amid dandy-brushes and spoke-brushes and chamois-leather and glass cases covering rock-work. There were little sponges on a card, and Matt started violently as he read, "Coble's five-cent sponges." The mountain had come to Mahomet!

He walked in, crunching over a débris of shells, grit, and sand, and inhaling a pungent saline odor. A veritable mountain of a man towered over him with beetling brows and snowy hair and beard. His paunch protruded imposingly, and his eyes glittered.

"Mr. Coble?" said Matt, inquiringly.

"That's me," cried the mountain of flesh, in fierce accents, as if defying contradiction.

Matt felt the business would not be easy.

"I've taken the liberty of coming to you—on behalf of—"

"Not that tarnation Frenchman?" shrieked Mr. Coble.

Matt reddened uncomfortably.

"That's the fifth man he's sent me. When did you come out of prison?"

"I've been painting the jailer's portrait," Matt stammered, with burning cheeks. "And I used to know the poor little man years ago, and he says—"

"I can't listen now. Does he think I've no business to attend to?"

"He didn't send me here, he sent me to your house."

"Ho, that's a new dodge. But I reckon he told you the old things, eh?—that I'm a stony-hearted cuss, that I'd sneak the coppers off a corpse's eyes or squeeze a cent till the eagle squeaked."

"No, really, he didn't tell me that," said Matt.

"Oh, you needn't spare the old man's feelings. I know what a man says when he finds you won't be swindled. He's the everlastingest old dodger that ever drummed for me. His tricks 'ould puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer. The only honest bit of work he ever did in his life was that thar pictur' of a shark. That's stunnin', I admit, and I'd willingly let the poor devil out of the cage if my darter warn't so bitter agen him. There, that's the truth. I never told it to any of the other fellows, they all looked such moulty jail-birds. Say now, you said you were a painter, ain't that a good pictur'?"

Although Mr. Coble's words were now more amiable, his accent was still fierce, and it required some courage on Matt's part to reply that the picture was pretty good in a manner that betokened that it was pretty bad.

"Ho, two of a trade!" quoth the mountain of a man.

"The shark couldn't be like that," Matt explained, mildly. "He has to turn on his back before biting. It isn't true to life."

"Waal," said Mr. Coble, in irate tones, "as the shark's got nothing at all to do with the sponge business, and the divers ain't in no sort o' danger whatever from it, I don't see where truth to life comes in, anyhow."

"Oh, but the less lies you tell in Art the better," urged Matt. "I'll do you another if you like."

"Ho, that's your dodge, is it?"

"I'm not asking anything for it," the young man retorted, indignantly. "It 'll be a return for your listening to my appeal."

Mr. Coble was startled.

"Thunderation!" he cried, sharply. "You're a Christian. Step outside, and we'll liquor up."

The invitation was uttered so fiercely that it sounded like a command, especially as the Titan stamped three times with his foot—only his way of signalling to his subordinate, Matt found. In the nearest bar, which happened to be an illicit one, approached through a porch at the back of a temperance hotel for the convenience of avowed teetotalers, the man-mountain imparted to Matt the information that it was the Frenchman's amorous advances that had imbittered his daughter. "For my part," he said, "so far from wantin' to keep him in there in clover, I'd like to lift him out on the point of my toe, and I'd make him vamoose from the town that smart you couldn't see his heels for the dust. I'll mention it to Rosina that you've been putting in a good word for the skunk, but I don't think she'll listen, that's a fact."

"Oh, but I'm sure she will," said Matt. "She looks a kind-hearted young lady."

"You haven't seen her!" exclaimed Mr. Coble, fiercely.

"Yes; I saw her this afternoon," said Matt.

"Then you've seen the purtiest gal you'll see this year. Set 'em up again. This old rye's whopping good. Always rely on a temperance hotel for good whiskey. And as my gal has a

goodish bit of money," pursued the old man, smacking his lips and growing communicative without losing any of the sternness of his accent, "you can understand what made the wretched little froggy roll his eyes and twist his mustache at her. How he found it out will be a mystery to my dyin' day, for I'm careful never to breathe a whisper of it to a single soul, but he ferreted out somehow or t'other that when she's twenty-one my Rosie will step into an income of eight hundred dollars."

He shouted the statement so loudly that the whole bar pricked up its ears. Matt quite believed that Coble was incapable of whispering anything to anybody. He had a vague envy of the fortunate girl.

"Not to mention three thousand dollars I've put aside myself to hand her on her wedding-day," continued Coble. "Young folks are lucky nowadays. When I married I had to lend my father-in-law ten dollars to rig himself up respectable for church."

Before they parted the mountain of flesh had consented thunderously to Matt's supplying another picture of the dangers of sponge-fishing, but would not bind himself, although in his third glass, to do more in return than lay the matter before his daughter. Once alone in the streets again, Matt felt he had made a bad bargain. The two and a half dollars the jailer had given him were all his funds, and even the few nickels that would have to be expended on common water-colors and the double-royal card-board were a consideration. But he loyally executed the work in the bedroom he had ventured to take, finding rather a relief in this further postponement of the problem of his future. By the following afternoon he was back at Coble's with a brilliant sketch far more arrestive than the Frenchman's. The shark was more formidable, the nude diver more graceful, his netted bag more accurate, and the ocean-bed was a veritable fairy-land of sea-lichens and polyps. Coble glared long at the sketch as Matt held it up, but he said nothing.

"What do you think of it?" asked Matt, apprehensively, at last.

"What do I think of it?" roared old Coble, and rushing to the window he grabbed the old, inaccurate shark, tore it

savagely in two, snatched the new picture from the hands of the astonished Matt, filled up the vacancy with it, dashed outside to survey it from the sidewalk, and reappearing at the door, bellowed, "Step this way, young man," and stamped three times on the threshold.

Over the old rye he reported to the artist that he had found his Rosie more placable than usual; that she was even willing to listen to the young man's plea, though she seemed to want to hear it from his own mouth before deciding. Matt gladly consented to sup that evening with the mountain and his daughter. Free drinks never surprised him, but a free square meal was like having larks flying into one's mouth ready roasted.

It was the happiest evening he had spent for many a long day. There was a spotless cloth on the round table, and the food was good, if solid. Miss Coble made herself agreeable, and if she was not so pretty as her father saw her, her plump cheek was sufficiently rosy and her figure sufficiently comely and her frock sufficiently nice to be grateful to the eye of an artist and a young man just emerged from prison society, and starving for the amenities of life. Her light-blue eyes lit up pleasantly when he addressed her, or when she helped him to more griddle-cakes. Some stuffed birds over a low bookcase that contained a few brightly bound volumes reminded him pleasurably of past miseries. The stentorian voice of old Coble almost monopolized the conversation. He had much to say that was not worth listening to—on the bad crops of the year before last, the scarcity of helps, and the failure of the colony to go ahead, which was apparently connected with the uncleanliness of the inhabitants, as manifest from the small sales of bath-sponges. After dinner the mountain smoked, and after smoking the volcano slept.

"I'm afraid you think pa's got a bad temper," said Miss Coble, abruptly. She had hastily cleared away the supper dishes, and had seated herself, half recumbent amid a litter of sewing, upon a couch opposite the easy-chair which Matt now occupied. The young man instinctively glanced towards her trumpeting parent.

"Oh, he's sound enough; can't you hear?" she said, laughing gayly. "I only hope he doesn't disturb you. I'm used to it."

"I only hope I sha'n't disturb *him*," answered Matt.

"I guess he's making more noise than us," laughed Miss Coble. "He can't even be quiet when he's asleep. I was going to explain to you that he can't help it; there's something wrong with his throat. It happened when his voice broke in his boyhood, and it always sounds as if he was angry—it always frightens off strangers, but he is really the best-tempered papa in the township."

Matt smiled. "I did think he was rather a fire-eater at first," he admitted. "But I've found him real jolly, and couldn't quite make it out all this time." He continued to smile at the drollness of Coble's disability, and the girl's eyes met his in an answering gleam of merriment.

"Pa says you're a powerful painter, Mr. Strang," she said after a silence, filled up by ruttling sounds from pa's larynx.

"Oh, your pa's only seen a rough thing I did for him," he protested, diffidently.

"Never mind." She shook her head sagely. "I'm going down town to see it to-morrow," and she flashed a sunny smile at him that showed her teeth were white.

Matt murmured, uneasily: "Oh, it's not worth the trouble."

"It 'll do me good, anyway. I'm getting fat, pa says. Wouldn't it be awful if I was to take after him? You know he lives away from town so as to have exercise up and down Citadel Hill, but he might as well have lived over the store." And she giggled, not unmusically.

"You can't tell what he would have been," Matt reminded her with a smile.

"Gracious! you frighten me. He might have come through the walls! Do you think there is really any danger of my growing like him? Do tell!"

"There's no danger of your losing your good looks," replied Matt, gallantly.

"You mean I never had any," she said, with a roguish gleam that made the plump face piquant.

"Oh, you know what I mean," he protested, lamely.

Miss Coble meditatively picked up a piece of tape from the litter of sewing and put it round her waist. Then she measured her bust.

"Is that the proper proportion?" she said, holding it up. "Artists are supposed to know, aren't they?"

"The figure couldn't be better," said Matt.

The girl shook her head in laughing reproof.

"I guess I'd better measure you and prove it, then," said Matt, rising.

"My, how that lamp flares!" cried Miss Coble, rushing towards the table, and carefully fumbling with the regulator. Matt resumed his seat, feeling rather foolish; but soon, when the girl turned the talk on himself, the reserved, solitary young man found himself telling her of adventures by sea and land, which he had not told anybody, perhaps because nobody had ever asked him. He gave Halifax prison a wide berth, warding off her casual questions about his position and prospects by general statements about his artistic aspirations. Concerning aspects of London life Miss Coble's curiosity was at its keenest, her own experience of existence having been limited, she said, to Halifax and its environs, with faint, childish reminiscences of Greencastle, Pennsylvania, where her mother had died thirteen years before, when she was six years old.

"Oh, but I didn't mean to tell you my age," she said, pouting. "In ten years' time you will know I am nearly thirty."

Matt was about to reassure her by declaring that in ten years' time he would have forgotten all about her, when the fall of the sleeper's pipe checked the unchivalrous statement.

He rose to go as soon as the mountain awoke, for he had a goodish tramp before him.

Miss Coble accompanied him to the outer door. His eye was caught by the beauty of the moon, gleaming irregularly from a lurid rack of clouds. He stood in charmed silence gazing upward.

"What are you staring at? Aren't you going to say good-night?" asked Miss Coble, rather tartly.

His spirit returned to earth.

"Oh, good-night," he said, holding out his hand.

She put her fingers—rougher, but warmer—into his for the first time.

"Good-night," she said, softly.

He did not let her hand go immediately. At the last instant he was invaded by an indefinite conviction that something—he knew not what—had still to be done or said. He stood silent on the little platform.

As if echoing his thought, "Haven't you forgot something?" she asked.

His heart leaped violently with a thrilling suggestion. He looked into her quizzing eyes. They were on a level with his own, her shorter figure having the advantage of the raised threshold.

"I thought you came to speak to me about a Frenchman?" she went on.

He was relieved and disappointed.

"Of course; what a fool I am! I haven't said a word about him."

"Well, it's too late now. I can't stand talking here; the neighbors might see us."

"I'm so sorry," said Matt, in a woe-begone tone.

"Well, you'll have to come again to-morrow evening, then, if you want to go on with it, that's certain. Good-night again."

"Till to-morrow, then," said Matt, raising his hat.

He walked briskly down the gravel-path, glowing with the pleasure of the evening, and looking forward to another pleasant free meal on the morrow. Then his eye sought the moon again, but the cloud-rack had covered it up entirely.

CHAPTER XI

A HOSTAGE TO FORTUNE

Lying awake next morning after a night of troubled dreams, it flashed upon him that he ought scarcely to go and see Miss Coble again upon the mere impulsive invitation given on the door-step without her father's knowledge. He was angry with

"GOOD-NIGHT," SHE SAID, SOFTLY."

himself for having so curiously let himself drift away from the very purpose of his visit. He concluded he had best call on old Coble again at the store, and walked thither with hangdog mien, unable even now to shake off the jail. Old Coble was sorting out a bale of sponge into three baskets—one for bests, one for seconds, and one for thirds.

"Hello, young man!" he roared. Matt felt a momentary trepidation before he remembered that the old man meant his tones to be inviting. He crunched his way towards the mountain over the gritty débris, sniffing in the pungent aroma of the place. The old giant straightened himself, brushed the sand off each hand with the other, and, running his fingers through his white beard by way of combing that, held out his hairy paw to Matt. He gripped the young man's long fingers heartily, then waved him to a seat on an empty inverted sponge-box.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you," said Matt.

"Not at all," said Coble, in angry accents.

There was a pause.

"I made a fool of myself last night," Matt commenced, abruptly.

Coble looked down inquiringly at him.

"I didn't say one word to your daughter about the Frenchman," he continued, ruefully.

The mountain shook with explosive laughter.

"Ho, I suppose you were too taken up sayin' 'em about yourself."

Matt reddened uncomfortably, but was silent.

"The gal seems to know a powerful deal about you, anyway," said old Coble, with a Homeric chuckle.

"We had to talk about something," Matt explained, apologetically.

"Well, Rosie doesn't 'pear to want to talk about anything else, that's a fact. I reckon she was glad enough not to be reminded of the snivellin' Frenchy."

"Oh, but I've got to tell her," the young man urged, uneasily.

"Oh yes, she knows you've got to tell her. You're coming to-night, aren't you?"

"I thought of it," Matt stammered, taken aback, "if I might!"

"Ho, don't you be afraid of us; we don't bite. We ain't sharks." He spat out. "This gritty atmosphere makes one powerful dry."

Matt had an instant of intense mental conflict, impecuniosity contending with his instinct of what was due to the situation and Coble's past hospitalities.

"Will you liquor with me?" he said.

"I was just about to ask you that," and the mountain stamped his foot three times.

The moment the two glasses were set on the counter of the little secret bar Matt threw down a ringing dollar with careless magnificence. Coble put his paw on it and pushed it back to him, throwing down a rival dollar. There was a playful scuffle of shoving fingers, accompanied by expostulatory murmurs. Then Matt, rejoicing in defeat, resignedly pocketed his vanquished piece.

"What do you make out of that there paintin' business?" suddenly asked Coble, as he set down his half-emptied glass and lounged reposefully against the counter.

Matt took another sip of whiskey. "Oh, there are ups and downs," he said.

"Well, what's the uppiest up?"

"It depends," said Matt, vaguely. "If I could succeed in London there's no end to the money I might make. It isn't unusual to get three or four thousand dollars for a picture."

"Three or four thousand dollars!" roared the Titan. "Where do you think I was raised?"

"Why, my uncle in London has often paid five thousand dollars for a picture. Yes, and even ten, though that's usually after the painter's dead."

"Then why don't you go to London?"

"I can't afford it," said Matt, frankly. "I've been there, but it's a great job to get on without money, so I had to come back."

"But couldn't your uncle buy your pictures?"

"They weren't good enough yet," Matt explained, anxious to defend the family honor. "I want to study a lot more yet."

"Nonsense! what do you want to study for? Why, that thar shark of yours licks creation."

Matt shook his head. "I've got to go to Paris," he said, "and to Italy, and see all the great pictures. That's the only way a man can learn after a certain point." He added, proudly, "My cousin was sent to Paris by the Royal Academy of London. He won the Gold Medal."

"Why doesn't your uncle send you there, then? He 'pears to have made his pile."

Matt had to take another sip of whiskey before he could reply. "He knows I wouldn't take anything from anybody."

"Don't be a goney. *I* began life with high notions. Them thar sponges you saw me sortin' out just now—they're Florida cup grasses, but the fine-shaped ones in the first basket are goin' to be Levantine sponges soon as they are bleached with permanganate. Time was when I'd 'a thought that dishonest; now I see it's only the outsides o' things that the world wants. When you're a boss painter nobody 'll ask who bleached you."

"I hope I can get on without bleaching," Matt retorted.

"Ho, don't get mad! I don't mean to insinuate you're not genu*ine*. But the world ain't a soft place to get on in. They don't bath you with rose-water and Turkey firsts. I kinder fancy," he added, with a roguish twinkle, "you must have found that out of late. Now, what you want, Mr. Strang, is to marry a purty, level-headed, healthy gal, with two or three thousand dollars to tide over the time till you can make your five thousand a pictur."

Matt shot a startled glance at Coble's beaming face. What he read there supplemented the sensational suggestion of the Titan's words. A nervous thrill ran through all his body. The thought was like a lightning-flash, at once swift, dazzling, and terrifying. But without waiting to analyze his state of mind, he felt immediately that there was one thing which at the outset rendered the idea impossible. Honesty required that he should instantly put a stop to the parent's overtures, by informing him that he was a dishonored man—that he had been in prison. But still he shrank from self-exposure. The union was so impossible that it seemed superfluous to humiliate himself.

"Maybe," he replied; "but five thousand's only the uppiest up, as you call it. If I didn't get there, I might be thought a humbug."

"Oh! any smart man who saw that shark would take the risk of that; and, even if you didn't get to the uppiest up, there 'd be no fear of your coming down again to the downiest down."

Matt turned his eyes away, and his fingers tattooed nervously on the stem of his glass.

"That Frenchy friend of yours now, he had the sense and the sarse to want my gal, but, of course, no proper parent would trust his darter to a man like that. So there he lays in the downiest down—good name for jail, eh? Ho! ho!"

Matt wished his companion could moderate his accents; he did not relish this thunderous talk of jail.

"Well, I must be going now," he said.

"I'm with you; I'm with you," genially thundered Coble, sauntering after him into the sunny street. "You just think that pointer o' mine over; it lets you keep your independence and your high notions, and you ain't indebted to anybody. All you've got to do is to find a purty gal who's got money and who won't fool it away, a gal who's been raised simply and can do her own cookin' and make her own dresses, and don't play the pianner; you find a gal like that, with a sensible father that don't think wuss of a young man because he's been in the downiest down."

"You know?" Matt faltered. He came to a halt.

"Of course I know. Warn't it in the paper?"

"But I did paint the portrait of the jailer," he protested, his cheeks fiery.

"I knew you'd been in chokey all the same." Coble clapped his paw on the last button of his waistcoat. "A stomach that size warn't born yesterday. But I've kept it from Rosie; she don't understand business, nor how credit's a fair wind to-day, and to-morrow a tornado tearin' around and layin' everything low. You find a good father," pursued Coble, in accents as impersonal as they were angry, so that Matt fancied he had mistaken the Titan's import, "and convince him your folks are

respectable, and there's no wife foolin' around in London or New York City, and," here he resumed his walk, "if he don't jump at you—I'll—waal, I'm blamed if I don't give you my own darter. There!"

What he would have replied to this wager Matt never knew, for with a sudden cry of "Thunderation! The shark's stolen," the mountain bounded forward with incredible alacrity and dashed into the store.

But it was his own child who was the temporary thief. Matt, following Mr. Coble back into the store to see if his picture had been really paid the compliment of appropriation, found father and daughter bending admiringly over it as it stood on the counter, propped up against some large coarse grass-sponges. His heart beat faster with surprise and excitement.

"Hullo! You here?" said Rosina, raising a face that seemed radiant amid the dull browns and grays of the store.

"I didn't know you would be here," he answered, awkwardly, not knowing what to reply.

"Why, didn't I tell you yesterday I was coming?"

She looked roguishly at him from beneath the broad brim of her flower-wreathed hat, whose narrow black-velvet strings were tied coquettishly under her left ear.

"So you did. I forgot," he said.

"You seem to forget everything," she responded, pertly.

"Yes, he's lost his head altogether," roared old Coble.

"Thank you for reminding me," said Matt, eagerly. "Now you are here I can tell you what the Frenchman says."

"Bother the Frenchman!" said Miss Coble, pouting.

"Yes, but he's languishing in prison this fine, bright day—"

"Mr. Strang painted the jailer's portrait. That's how he met the rogue," old Coble interrupted.

"And he often cries," went on Matt.

Miss Coble laughed.

"Gracious, you make me feel like a princess, keeping men in dungeons."

"Well, that's how you ought to feel," said Matt.

"Then I guess I'll take the privilege of a princess," said Miss Coble. "I'll let him out on my wedding-morn."

Coble roared with laughter.

"There, that's a fair offer for you, my boy."

Matt felt very embarrassed, but he ventured to hope, "for the poor devil's sake," that Miss Coble would get married soon.

"I hope not," said Coble, to Matt's relief. "You're forgettin' *this* poor devil. What am I to do without my Rosie?"

"Oh, you'll get along all right," said Miss Coble, with a playful tug at his drooping white beard. "You can send for Aunt Clara."

"I wish you'd be serious about the poor man in the prison," Matt pleaded.

"I am serious," Miss Coble insisted, indignantly.

"Oh yes, she's serious," interposed the parent. "She's solid, is Rosie. You can't squeeze her like this 'ere sponge. 'Pears to me the only way to help your man is to hurry on the marriage."

The advent of a customer here removed him, chuckling, from the conversation; and while he was talking angrily to the newcomer, Matt, who had been itching to slip away, found himself compelled to linger on and entertain the young lady, a task which he ended by finding pleasant enough. When she at last said she must go about her marketing, he even asked if there was anything he could carry for her.

"Gracious, no! we get the things sent. But you can walk along, if you have nothing better to do."

So Matt threaded his way with her among the busy stores, feeling her a part of the sunny freshness of the day, to which he was now alive again; and walking with head erect, for he felt himself rehabilitated by the companionship of so genteel a member of society. He was amused by the keen bargains she drove, and acquired a new interest in prices. Evidently Coble was right—she would make a provident house-keeper. But she would only let him see her part of the way home, though she told him papa expected him to join their evening meal.

"He's taken quite a fancy to you," she said. "I don't know why, I'm sure."

"I don't know why, either," said Matt, simply.

"Perhaps that's why," Miss Coble answered, enigmatically.

Then she lent him her gloved fingers for a moment, and gave him a pleasant smile, and tripped away, and he went back and down to the water-side, and lounged about aimlessly in the sun, sky and sea and shipping and the glimpses of hill and forest across the harbor and the white sea-gulls and the bronzed Scandinavian sailors thrilling him with the old sense of the beauty and romance of life. But the open air gave him an appetite, too, and the appetite brought him back to the sordidness of things, to his nigh-bare pockets and the insistent sphinx of his future. He laid out a few cents to stave off hunger till evening should bring better fare at Coble's; then, in the stronger mood induced by even this minimum of nutriment, a tiresome inner voice began asking by what right he meditated foisting himself upon strangers. He had no longer the excuse of the Frenchman. He had heard Miss Coble's ultimatum on that matter. And the tiresome voice persisted in dragging up other troublesome thoughts from the depths of consciousness. As he walked about the lively quays it kept repeating Mr. Coble's observations, though less loudly. Despite some dubious remarks, despite the *à priori* improbability and unexpectedness of the whole thing, was it possible for Matt to doubt that the old man would be willing to give him his daughter? With whatever timidity he shrank from facing the possibility, wilfully closing his eyes as before a great glare, he could not but feel that Coble's idea was both rash and generous. Of course his future would justify the old man's trust and repay it a hundred-fold, but such confidence was none the less touching. Coble did not know—the sun and sea had made the young man drunk again—that he was entertaining a genius. And Miss Coble, too; how kind of her to be so nice to a penniless young man! Her pleasant smiles had been medicinal sunshine to his despairing apathy. If he had not met the Cobles, what would have become of him? But was the girl quite of her father's mind towards him? Her attitude was certainly not repellent. He allowed himself to dally undisguisedly with the idea, and it made him giddy. The hope of Art flamed again so fiercely that he wondered how it could have lain smouldering so long in his bosom. He was like a pedestrian toiling foot-sore and heart-broken towards a great

light that shone celestially on the verge of the horizon. For years he had followed the sacred gleam, over lonely deserts and waste places, with hunger and thirst and pain; and now as, with bleeding feet that could drag along no longer, he was fain to drop down on the way-side, lo! a sound of wheels and a sudden carriage at his side, and he had but to step in to be driven luxuriously to the long-tantalizing goal.

And in this fairy carriage, moreover, sat a pretty maiden, on whose ripe breast he could pillow his tired head, and in whose arms he could find consolation for the blank years. Oh! it was bewildering, dazzling, intoxicating. But did he love the maiden of this enchanting vision? Well, what was love? It would certainly be sweet to hold her warm hand in his, to see her blue eyes soften with tenderness as they gazed into his own. It was so long since a woman had kissed him—such weary, crawling, barren years! That ancient episode with Priscilla came up, as it had not seldom done before, transfigured by the haze of time and the after-glamour of romance; he had long since forgotten how little the girl had really appealed to him in the flesh, and to remember that he had spurned her caresses did not always give him a glow of moral satisfaction. In the delicious sunshine that danced to-day in a myriad gleams on the green waters, and made the air like wine, lurked a subtle appeal to his mere manhood. Were not all women equally lovable for their sex? In the novels and poems he had read love was glorified and woman was a spirit; in his own soul lay divine conceptions of womanhood that inspired his art and sanctified his dreams: a womanhood whose bodily incarnation—imagined now in this gracious shape, now in that—was the outer symbol of an inner loveliness of thought and emotion. But he had not met this Ideal Womanhood; nor did he even expect to meet it in the crude common day. Once or twice in his London life, as in his boyhood in this very city of Halifax, when he had worshipped the beautiful horsewoman, he had seemed to catch a glimpse of it, but it was always far off—as far as the star from the moth. And so, whether seen or divined, it belonged almost equally to that world of imagination in which his true life had been lived, in which he had always taken refuge from the real. He had

scarcely known before a girl so refined as Miss Coble, unless, perhaps, it was the adolescent Ruth Hailey, whose shy stateliness had made her so alien from the little girl he dimly remembered taking for a sweetheart in those days of childish mimicry when one drives broomsticks for horses. Why should he not marry this pleasant, plump young woman, if she would condescend to him? Though her position was so much better than his, he did not feel her too remote from him for comfortable companionship, especially as she would never know that he had been in jail. If he did not love her, in the vague transcendental sense, at least he did not love any other woman, and was never likely to. He was not as other men: his life was not in their world; it was centred on Art, it was occupied with visions, its goal was not happiness or a home. But if these offered themselves to him by the way, even while they made his real goal possible, it were mere insane self-martyrdom to refuse them. A wife would save him from his lower self, and in his moments of artistic despair she would always be there to comfort and console. Nay—and he smiled at the consideration—even in his moments of artistic achievement, she could be there as a model. Models ran away with a great deal of money, and for an artist a wife was really an economy. And if in his artistic aspiration she could have no share, neither could any one else, woman or man. An artist could not really have a mate—at most a mistress or a house-keeper. His Art was a holy of holies, in which he must ever be the sole priest, and in this holy of holies Ideal Womanhood could still have its place as before.

Such are the pitfalls of the artistic temperament, moving amid unrealities, spinning its own cosmos.

Three thousand dollars down! He could pay off the storekeeper and cleanse away the prison stain. He could send Madame Strang her little balance, and, best of all—and the thought moved him almost to tears — his poor brothers and sisters would henceforth be certain of their allowance. For himself the prospects were equally tempting—a honey-moon in Europe, in the cities of romantic dream, amid the masterpieces of Art. And then when, after a couple of years of study and work, his own masterpiece should be completed, a settled income of eight

hundred dollars — bread and cheese always sure, putting him for life beyond the vulgar necessity of pandering to the market, rescuing him from that sordid internal conflict which imbittered even when it failed to degrade. Oh, the rapture of a life so consecrated to Art!

But would Miss Coble or her parent consent to this expenditure of the money? Of course it would all have to be distinctly understood ere he could agree to marry the girl. He flushed, finding how mercenary motive predominated in his reverie. Mr. Coble had indeed hinted acquiescence in some such scheme. But an instinct kept the young man from concluding to acquiesce in it himself. A vague shame and repugnance struggled with his sense of the advantages of the match; waxing so strong in the reaction that followed the glow of temptation that he determined not to go to the Cobles' that evening. This visit, he felt, would be fatal.

He went home to his little room in the central slums, determined not to stir out. He had meant to go to bed, broad day though it was, and sleep away the temptation. But he only threw himself upon the pallet, in his clothes, and was more conscious of hunger than of the heaviness necessary for sleep. Yet he would not break into his last two dollars to-day. He tried to divert his mind from Miss Coble's dowry by alternative projects for continuing his life, but they only served to show the length of the bleak, arid, solitary road that lay before his bruised feet if he let the carriage go by. Money! Money! Money! What had he not suffered from the struggle for it? Degrading to live on another person's money? It was life without money that was degrading, humiliating, full of petty considerations, consumed in irrelevant labors. In the novels that made such a fuss about love troubles, the fine-sounding sorrows seemed to him infinitely smaller than the carks and worries of prosaic existence.

He dozed a little and dreamed of his mother. He was back in childhood, standing with bare feet in an icy passage, and she was screaming at Harriet for refusing to marry Mr. Coble. He went through all the old agony of these frequent domestic tragedies. But he did not feel cold so much as hungry, and breakfast

was being delayed by the squabble. He heard Daisy, equally aggrieved, lowing in the barn. In the face of the advantages of the Coble marriage it did seem unreasonable of Harriet to stick to Bully Preep, who would probably beat her. He awoke with a sensation of relief, which was instantly exchanged for a new worry. Ought he to tell the Cobles about his mother, supposing he really thought of— But no; he did not think of— And, in any case, there was no use in raking up unpleasant matters. He had not inherited her dementia; it was not in her blood; it had grown up gradually from the sad, narrow circumstances of her lot; it was his father that he took after. He was not mad; he was more likely to go mad if he continued his terrible solitary struggle. Unless, indeed—and here came a sudden vision of a scene that had lain forgotten for long years—unless, indeed, Mad Peggy had been right! Mad Matt! Oh no, it was madness to attach any meaning to the Water-Drinker's words. Never had he felt so sane. He got up and looked into the dusty glass on the wash-stand. That was not the face of a madman. She had prophesied he would never be happy—never, never! He would thirst and thirst for happiness, but never would he quench his thirst. Ah, the crazy creature was right there, anyhow. He watched with curious interest the tears rolling down the face in the mirror. Well, be it so! He was strong, he could dispense with happiness. He would not go to the Cobles' that evening. To-morrow he would leave Halifax, and join his folks in Cobequid at last. They would all live out their lives together—poor victims of a common destiny. He would work on the farm, he would rent more land, he would make it pay. His uncle had been right all along. Why had he not taken his advice and stayed on at Cattermole's farm? Ah, well, his dream of Art was over now. He was getting on in years; the energy had been buffeted out of him. One could not always be young and ambitious. He would never be famous now; he would toil obscurely like his brothers and sisters, and his bones would lie with theirs in the little lonesome church-yard among the pines. It did not matter; nothing mattered. Death would shovel them all away soon enough.

He lay down on the bed again. Near it stood a wash-stand with a piece of ragged sponge upon it. His eye noted a patch of light on the sponge, and he wondered how the sunshine had got there. Then he perceived the yellow patch was only a reflection from the water-bottle, and his thoughts turned to the problem of painting sunlight by optical illusion. He thought of Cornpepper and the fellows and all the happy discussions he had had in London. The afternoon waned into evening; the patch of mock sunshine faded; the shadows gathered, shrouding the walls with mystery.

He grew faint with hunger; in the dusk there opened out a picture of a lamp-lit room with a snowy cloth on its round table, and a plump figure with soft blue eyes presiding over the savory dishes.

The vision drew him. He rose, washed himself carefully, and went out.

A month later, a week before his marriage, Matt Strang journeyed to Cobequid to see his folks, and bid them farewell before leaving for his artistic honey-moon in Europe. He had written the news home, but they could not afford to come to Halifax for the wedding, and so he had promised to run down before starting on his second voyage in search of Art. He alighted from the coach at Cobequid Village overwhelmed with emotion, resolved to walk the rest of the way towards the joyous reunion with his brothers and sisters; he wished to note each familiar landmark—the fields, the farms, the stores, the little meeting-house, all the beloved features of the spacious, scattered wooden metropolis of his childhood. It was almost noon, and the landscape, seen through the waves of hot air rising from the soil, quivered in the heat. The white farm-houses glittered; the paint of the verandas bulged out; the wooden spire of the meeting-house pointed piously to a heaven of stainless blue. In the farm-yards the fowls lolled prostrate on their sides with open mouths and drooping wings, their tongues protruding, their eyes closed, their legs every now and then uneasily stirring up the dust under their wings; the cattle and horses stood deep in pools under the trees. The bumble-

bees droned sleepily about the wild roses of the way-side, or buzzed among the white-weed and yellow buttercups and dandelions that mottled the hay-fields. The red squirrels chattered on the spruces as they sat shelling cones, their tails curved over their backs; the woodpeckers tapped on the hollow stubs, the blue-jays screamed among the branches; a hawk circled tranquilly upward to a speck, then sailed softly downward with motionless wings outspread. In the fields men were hoeing potatoes, following the slow oxen that dragged the ploughs between the furrows, and heaping up the earth with leisurely, monotonous movements; belated sowers of buckwheat were scattering the triangular grains with a slow, measured, hypnotic motion. In the sultry stores there was nothing doing; now and then a store-keeper in his shirt-sleeves spat solemnly or drawled a lazy monosyllable. Behind a casement a slumbrous old crone snuffed herself. A wagon rumbled dustily beneath the overarching trees. The far-stretching village drowsed in the sun.

High noon. The conches began sounding to call the farm-hands to dinner, and every sign of labor melted away. The languor crept over the young pedestrian. A perception of the futility of ambition flooded his soul like a wave of summer sea, soft and warm and bitter. To pass through life tranquil and obscure, amid the simplicities and sanctities of childish custom, with work and rest, with feast-day and Sunday; to walk in foot-worn ways amid the same fragrant wild-flowers, to the music of the same birds, hand in hand with a daughter of the same soil, to whom every hoar usage and green meadow should be similarly dear; to carry on the chain of the quiet generations, and so pass lingeringly towards a forgotten grave amid humble kinsfolk—were not this sweeter than the trump and glare of Fame, and the ache of ambition, and the loneliness of untrodden footways? He seemed to hear Mad Peggy's mocking laughter in the distance.

He moved curiously in the direction of the sounds, skirting a new barn-like building which blocked his view, and which he saw from a notice was a Baptist meeting-house, such as his mother had always yearned for; McTavit's school-house met his

gaze, still standing in its field, and in the foreground a mob of boys and girls shouting and laughing with the exuberance of school-children just let out. After a moment he perceived that they were jeering and hooting somebody; then he caught a glimpse of the ungainly figure of a young man in the centre of derision, with a dozen hands playfully pulling and pushing him. The poor butt fell down, and there was a great outburst of hilarious delight. Matt's blood boiled; he ran quickly forward towards the booing juvenile crowd, which scattered a little at the sight of his flaming countenance.

"You pesky little ——!" he cried. Then his voice failed. With a flash of horror he recognized his brother Billy.

"Boo!" recommenced one of the bigger louts. "Rot-gut rum!"

Matt seized the crutch which lay at the side of the prostrate drunken cripple, and described a threatening circle with it; the pack of children broke up and made off, hooting from a safer distance.

"Billy!" he said, hoarsely, clutching the wretched young fellow by the coat-collar, half to raise him, half in instinctive anger.

Returning intelligence struggled with the look of maudlin pathos on Billy's white face. The shock of the sight of his brother sobered him. He suffered himself to be lifted to his feet, then he took his crutch and moved forward, refusing further help.

"I kin walk," he said, sullenly.

The tone and accent grated on Matt's ear. But a pang of self-reproach mixed with his wrath and disgust. It was his part to have looked after Billy better.

"I didn't expect we should meet like this, Billy," he said, softly.

"You should hev come sooner," Billy retorted, "'stead of gaddin' about all the world over enjoyin' yourself, and never comin' nigh us, not even when you were tourin' in the Province with your portraits an' your photographers."

"I never was near enough, and I always had to move on," he explained, gently, as he flicked the dust of the road off Billy's coat.

"Never mind my clothes; they won't spoil, they're not so fine as yours. If you're 'shamed to walk with me—"

"Don't talk like that, Billy. I'm only glad to see how well you can walk."

The brothers passed defiantly through the straggling remnants of the juvenile crowd.

"I've walked to the village," said Billy. "I'm strong enough to go anywhere a'most."

A few hoots recommenced in the rear.

"I wish you hadn't gone to the village to-day," sighed Matt.

"And why shouldn't I?" cried Billy, pricked to savagery again. "What is there for me but gittin' drunk? I got drunk when you wrote the news—so I did. Thet was the first time. We all drank your health an' your bride's, an' I got drunk, an' I'm glad I found out the joy of it. Why shouldn't I hev some pleasure too? I'll never hev a bride of my own—thet's certain. What girl would take me? Do you deny it? Why, even when Ruth Hailey was here she on'y pitied me."

"Hadn't we better get a lift?" said Matt, gently, for a carriage was rumbling behind them.

"I've been twice to the rum-hole since the money came," pursued Billy, in dogged defiance. "It's the on'y way to forgit everythin'."

He stumped on sturdily. Beads of perspiration glistened on his white, bloodless face.

"What money came?" Matt asked, puzzled.

"The two hundred and fifty dollars you sent a couple of days after you got engaged."

"I never sent two hundred and fifty dollars," he cried.

"Didn't you?" Billy opened his large, pathetic eyes wider. "Well, now, that's funny. We wondered why you did it so curiously, and why the postmark was Maine. We thought you were up to some fun, now you had so much money, but we allowed we'd wait till you came."

But Matt could not solve the mystery. The notes had been addressed to "The Strangs," and were accompanied by a slip of paper: "The same amount of the money due to you will be forwarded next year."

That was all the message. Matt exhausted himself in guesses. His thoughts even went back to the owners of the *Sally Bell*, imagining some tardy conscience-money in repayment of arrears due to the dead captain. At last he concluded the remittance must have come from Madame Strang, acting through some American agent. She had discovered Herbert owed him money, and was sending him double and quadruple by way of remorse for the mistake she and her husband had made. To prevent him from returning it, she had sent it to his family, and anonymously.

Abner Preep contended that there was no occasion for Matt to help his brothers and sisters further for the present. The subsidy was ample; more would only lead to unnecessary extravagance. Matt was not entirely pleased to find his family had no immediate need to profit by his marriage. Indeed, he almost wished the money had not come. It was perturbing to feel in himself a yearning—now that his burdens were lightened—to make one last desperate effort to take the kingdom of Art by his own unaided assault; it was even more perturbing to feel himself solicited by that other self, which had spoken out on that sultry summer afternoon, to abandon Art altogether for the simple restfulness of a life in his own village at one with Nature. The life that had cramped him once seemed curiously soothing now; his old fretful sense of superiority to this Philistine environment was gone. But most perturbing of all was the thought of Rosina. In neither of these suggested alternatives—to have another try alone, or to settle down in Cobequid—did she play any part, and he always came back with a shock to the recollection of his relation to her, that made both of these futures impossible. He would not allow himself to dwell for a moment on the thought of backing out of his engagement—honor forbade that. And was he even certain that he did not care for her? How piquant she had looked now and then when she had accidentally got into one or other of the two postures that became her best, as on the night when, smiling, she had thrown back her head a little to the left, with the somewhat plebeian nose refined by foreshortening, and the warm carmines and ivory of the face and throat showing in the lamplight against

the loosened hair. And then how simple and unpretentious she was, how charmingly candid her chafferings with the storekeepers! But it eased his mind somewhat to find Billy selfishly laying claim to the mysterious money, persisting he would travel with it — he would see the world. Matt persuaded Harriet to acquiescence in the idea, relieved to find his immediate responsibilities to the smaller children restored to him. But, unknown to Billy, Matt had already decided he must, if possible, take charge of the poor fellow and keep him from drink. He wrote to ask Rosina's permission to let his crippled brother travel with him, as his health needed a sea voyage. He waited anxiously for the reply.

"I can reffuse my darling nothing," Rosina responded, with more promptitude than orthography.

"God bless you," murmured Matt, kissing the letter. "I believe I shall love you, after all."

Book III.—CHAPTER I

CONQUEROR OR CONQUERED?

Foresight is insight. It was due to Matthew Strang's ignorance of life and of himself that his marriage in no way turned out as he had calculated. Oh, the fatal mistake of it, perceived as soon as it was too late, though he shrank weakly from the perception, afraid to face the chill, blank truth, hoping against hope that love would be the child of marriage. Oh, the ghastliness of being chained to a loving woman he did not love, bound by law and honor to simulate a responsive affection, and to hide the deadly apathy which her caresses could not overcome. He tried hard to love her, calling his own attention to her youth, her freshness, her prettiness, her flashes of expression, making the most of every hint of charm, seeing her through a wilful glamour, even attempting to persuade himself that she was the woman of his dreams; all the while his leaden heart coldly refusing itself to the hollow pretence. Before the marriage he had almost felt on the point of love; but it was only, he knew later, the self-disguise of cupidity and mercenariness, though no doubt a measure of gratitude had helped to becloud his vision. In his bachelor days he could never have imagined such indifference to any woman. Sometimes he wondered if this was all marriage meant to any man, but a wistful incredulity denied him the consolation of acquiescence in a common lot. The testimony of mankind was quite other, and his own yearning instinct refused to look upon his union as typical. If only she had been a little more intellectual, less limited to gossip about servants and prices! How he had deceived himself, taking the sprightliness of a young girl in love, the coquettish gayety, the evanescent brilliancy of a bird in the pairing season,

for the output of perennial intellect and good-humor! He had lived so much alone with his dreams that he had fallen out of touch with humanity, and particularly with feminine humanity. He had had no standard of comparison by which to gauge her, and once united to her, the habitual recluse could not accommodate himself to her constant companionship.

What an irony their honey-moon in Paris, in Florence, the ardors of artistic renascence yoked with the blankness of boredom! Despite Rosina's affectionate clinging to him, and her almost pathetic endeavor to admire old churches and dingy picture-galleries, it was a relief to both when she at last acquiesced in his happy idea of regarding his rounds as "work," and, under the convoy of Billy, beguiled the expectation of fonder reunion by the more exhilarating spectacle of the streets and the endless glories of the *Bon Marché*. And very soon she wearied altogether of foreign places, clamoring to be settled in London, where the language was not gibberish, and one could go a-marketing without being bamboozled and cut off from bargaining. For after the first fervors of the honey-moon she had developed that instinct for petty economy which had amused and charmed him when he had gone shopping with her in Halifax, but which now fretted him, seeming like a daily reproach for all those great sums her acquisition of him had cost her. He was glad that the due arrival of the second mysterious instalment promised to the Nova-Scotian household relieved him of the painful necessity of applying to her on its behalf. Unexpectedly enough this sum was supplemented by a dividend of a hundred and fifteen dollars paid to him, after he had forgotten all about the matter, by the trustee in Halifax in settlement of his claim against the estate of the Starsborough ship-builder.

In vain he tried to interest his wife in books, in the poems and essays, in the study of French and German, into which he now threw himself with a feverish desire for culture. In vain he tried to impart to her his vision of nature, to get her to observe scenery and sunsets. Colors and shades were only interesting to her as they occurred in dress materials. Once when they stood by a sea-beach on a December afternoon under a cold, gray sky, and Rosina complained of the dreariness of

the seascape, he had attempted to show her how beautiful it really was, how much more interesting to the artistic eye than a crude sunlight effect; how nearest the horizon it was grayish steel-blue, and then a still amber, and then emerald green, and how just before the final fringe of both there shone a band of sparkling amber, grayed by cloud-reflections. But Rosina shivered, and refused to see anything but a chill green waste.

She would not even allow him to arrange her furniture, and a pair of colossal pink vases, garishly hand-painted with pastoral figures (picked up "a bargain"), were a permanent pain to him, spoiling for him the drawing-room of the little North London house with the rude whitewashed studio, in which they had settled down after the birth of their first child. The temporary lull that attended their installation in British domesticity was succeeded by graver frictions when Rosina had finished furnishing. They had no society; neither of the couple knew anybody in London, and the husband shrank from making friends, constrained, moreover, by his art to a solitary way of living. Rosina, who before her child demanded her care had sat to him out of pure desire to be with him, began to be jealous of the models who replaced her, declaring that she had had no conception such goings-on were a part of art or she would never have married him.

The only alleviation of his numb misery was his ability to paint without pecuniary under-thought the picture with which he was to storm the Academy, to throw all his individuality into it. The very seclusion of his life favored this devotion to his ideals.

And these ideals were only partially those of his celibate. He had been swaying to and fro under the opposite solicitations of Idealism and Realism; now in a violent upheaval, his sympathy with modern subjects and even with modern methods had been submerged.

On the Continent for the first time he came into contact with the Old World. London had been to him as modern as America, repeating its ideas and ideals, but in France, and more especially in Italy, the mere variation of tongues helped to draw him into an earlier world, co-operated with the appeal of ancient churches and streets and palaces, and the countless treasure of ancient Art.

The modern world grew hateful to him, and he absorbed by affinity the ancient and the mediæval. At bottom it was not so much the modern that repelled him as real life, and it was not so much the past towards which he yearned as towards that timeless realm wherein ideal beauty dwells. The past was at least less real than the present. Real life was horrible, and marriage had put the coping-stone on his dissatisfaction with it. From birth to death it was embased by a sordid series of physical processes. Even the much-vaunted love was hideous at root. Beauty itself was never really perfect, and was transient at best, while the beautiful idea that lurked in nearly every human face and figure had for the most part been left embryonic. Only in Art could the imperfections of Nature be corrected—and this was the Artist's mission, not to imitate Nature, but to transcend her; from her faulty individuals, frail and perishable, to draw types of perfection, flawless, immortal, like that Venus de Milo, which stood at the end of the Louvre passage, beautiful from every standpoint, fixing in its pensive sweetness of spiritualized form his dream of Ideal Womanhood; or like that mighty torso of winged Victory that had achieved the last victory over its own mutilation. Real life was Deacon Hailey and his mad mother and Billy and Rosina and his uncle and the grimy denizens of the London slums and the blackguardly crowd at the Fleet Street public-house and the lewd workmen in the Starsborough ship-yard. But Art was Rosalind and Imogen, Hamlet and Ariel, Don Quixote and Beatrix Esmond, and the love in Shelley's lyrics, and the music of Beethoven, and the pictures of Botticelli, and the cold white statues of the Greeks—that imaginary world which man's soul had called into being to redress the balance of the Real. It was Art against Nature throughout—the immortal shadows against the ephemeral realities.

> "She cannot fade though thou hast not thy bliss,
> Forever wilt thou love and she be fair."

And so for the "real atmosphere" of Cornpepper he no longer cared: what mattered the realities of space more than those of time to the soul, emperor of its own fantasy? All this scientific precision after which he had been hankering—was it

not irrelevant to Art? The Beautiful was the Ideal; to create the Ideal, the Real must be passed through the crucible of the Artist's soul. The Artist was the true creator. In him Nature's yearning to beget the Beautiful became conscious. She herself had infinite failures—ugly moods, fogs, glooms, skies of iron, seas of tin. And feeling all this instinctively rather than by a lucid excogitation, he was now for the ideal, for the romantic, for the religious even, for anything that was not real, that shut out the unbeautiful necessity, as those glorious stained windows of cathedrals, blazing with saints, shut out the crude daylight and the raw air of reality, filtering the garish sunlight to that dim religious light in which the soul could see best. Ah, how wisely the poor human soul had fenced itself in against the bleak realities—even as the body had housed itself against the inhospitalities of Nature—painting its windows with beautiful dreams, with an incarnate Love that ruled the world, and an image of immaculate Motherhood. And in a strange hybrid, hazy blend of Catholicism and Hellenism, possible only to an artist who sees things by their sensuous outsides, the Venus de Milo and the Madonna of the Italian masters were to him more akin by beauty than divorced by dogma. In a sense they were one—the highest types of Beauty conceivable by the Pagan and Christian ages, so akin that when Botticelli came to draw Venus, as in his "Nascita di Venere," his brush fashioned a meek Miltonic Eve, prefiguring the Virgin Mother, while Andrea del Sarto, in his Annunziazone in the "Pitti," had given the Virgin Mother almost the brooding serenity of a Greek goddess. Ideal Womanhood, Ideal Womanhood, this was what poor Matthew Strang seemed to find in either—ay, and even in Perugino's "Magdalen," and the saying of Keats, "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty," seemed to him to be indeed all that mortals needed to know.

But that Pagan serenity which had produced Greek art could not be his. For him as for the ages the first sensuous joy in beauty was over. And what appealed even more than the Greek marbles to the artist who had set out from his native village with quick blood, worshipper of a beautiful world, was that subtler art which expressed rather the inad-

equacy than the perfection of life; the wistfulness of a Botticelli Madonna, the unfathomable smile of a Leonardo portrait, the pensive melancholy of Lorenzo di Credi's "Unknown Youth" in the Uffizi, or the mystic aspiration of the monk in that famous "Concerto di Musica," and inversely Raphael's lovelier line than Nature's, and Michael Angelo's with its more majestic sweep. He longed with that yearning, with which the boy had looked up to the stars in the midnight forest, for God, for Christ, for Apollo, for some dream of whiteness and beauty, for something that persisted beneath all the purposeless generations of which the Louvre held record in those cumbrous relics of vanished civilization—Egyptian, Phœnician, Syrian, Babylonian, Persian, Chaldean — those broken shafts of pillars that had upheld barbaric temples, those friezes that had adorned the façades of palaces, those blurred monuments perpetuating the victories of forgotten dust, those faded bass-reliefs that had pleased the lustful eyes of nameless kings, enthroned in their gigantic halls, those uncouth torsos of bulls and sphinxes, emblems of a vaster, crueller life. Amid the flux of the centuries the visibles of Art, the invisibles of Religion—were not these the only true Realities?

Such had been Matthew Strang's thoughts, as in a deep silence he walked through the Louvre with Rosina, a silence that was at its deepest when he responded to her chatter. She hated the slippery parquet and the dull oil-colors under the glazed skylight, preferring the fresh coloring of the copies, though she made fun of the copyists who sat so patiently on their stools. What queer men, what funny, frumpy girls, what strange old ladies! And, look! there was a young woman in widows' weeds, painting such a cute picture, and—gracious! there was quite a young girl copying a naked man—weren't they horrid, the French? She liked the attendants' cocked hats with a dash of gilt, and enjoyed the desultory crowd of perambulating spectators, that ranged from old gentlemen hobbling along on sticks to artisans in red blouses and clayey boots. And wouldn't Matt come back into the jewelry and china departments, which were really interesting? And wasn't the heat unbearable? It was her restlessness that made her husband quit this Paris which fascinated him,

this beautiful city, with whose artistic activity, divined from the mere architecture of the École des Beaux Arts, he had had no opportunity to get into intimate touch; for he could not even come across Herbert, whom he had rather hoped to find still there, a cicerone to initiate him into the art-coteries of Paris. In Florence, where they went for the winter, Rosina was even more restless. The towered palaces, the Duomo, and the gracious Campaniles, the gardens, the enchanting environs, and all the stock wonders of the place, had none but a superficial interest for her; they were exhausted at first sight; amid the marble calm of colonnades she even regretted the liveliness of the Boulevards. And the climate, too, was worse than that of Paris; her grumblings were perpetual. To pass from the warm piazza or promenade to the biting wind of the narrow streets was not only uncomfortable, but made it a problem how to dress. And, indeed, Matt himself suffered keenly from the cold; though there was a small brass heating apparatus in the centre of the gallery, it scarcely did more than keep his colors from congealing. For he was copying Botticelli's "Virgin with the Child and Angels." Yes, Botticelli had become his master—Botticelli, whom at first sight in the National Gallery he had rejected for insufficient draughtsmanship, but all of whose naïve exaggerations, of hands or feet or necks, he now credited to artistic intention, prepared to maintain from loving study of his delicately luminous canvases and his blond ethereal frescos that the Master's drawing had only repudiated the bonds of the Real in quest of a higher beauty, a more gracious harmony of curves, even as his coloring had refined away that oleaginous quality which a Rubens found in human flesh. To brood over a Madonna of Botticelli or of Filippo Lippi, Matthew Strang would turn from the women of Rubens or the young men of Titian or the children of Velasquez or Rembrandt's old men. Though at the sight of "Les Glaneurs" of Millet he felt a lurking sympathy in his submerged self, he preferred that morning landscape of Corot, in which bodiceless beauties dance round trees as half-dressed women never did in any period of French history. He found a winter scene of Van Ostade's none the less charming because the figures

were not enveloped, and the lights were untruly set off by bituminous shadows. He was in the mood in which even the gilded rose-nudity of the eighteenth century seemed precious. Amid the infinitude of Art that surrounded him now, Corn-pepper's cocksureness seemed to him as futile as it had already appeared amid the infinity of Nature. And all the Masters were so akin that evolution by revolution seemed less credible than in the smoky atmosphere of Azure Art studios. Modern subject? Had they not all done the contemporary, had the Dutch done anything else? Impressionism? In so far as it meant a free brush-work, was not Rembrandt an Impressionist? Was not Velasquez in his later manner?

His first picture, then, need not be revolutionary in technique, but it must be more imaginative than the bulk of English work in the Academy of his day, more emotional. Photography had reduced realism to absurdity, had proved that Art lay in the transfusion of Nature through the artist's soul. And the essence of all art was emotion, feeling. The work of Art was but the medium by which the artist passed on his emotion to the spectator, his joy in beauty, his feeling for nature, his sadness, his aspiration, even his view of life. Because emotion could be conveyed by literature and music, there was no reason why these should have the preference in cases where painting was equal to conveying it, too. Without emotion a picture was null and void; technique by itself could give works of craft, never works of Art. On the other hand, to have the artistic emotion without the technique necessary to pass it on to the spectator was to be artistic, but not an artist.

The choice of a subject gave him much harassing hesitation; it brought delicious peace merely to make his final decision amid all the whirl of ideas that pressed upon him. He would found his picture on those beautiful lines in Matthew Arnold's "Forsaken Merman."

> "Once she sat with you and me
> On a red-gold throne in the heart of the sea,
> And the youngest sat on her knee.
> She combed its bright hair, and she tended it well,
> When down swung the sound of a far-off bell.

She sighed, she look'd up through the clear green sea;
She said: 'I must go, for my kinsfolk pray
In the little gray church on the shore to-day.
'Twill be Easter-time in the world—ah me!
And I lose my poor soul, Merman! here with thee.'"

The subject seemed to him made to his hand. It would enable him to fulfil his young ambitious dream of reconciling the decorative with the idea-picture; the composition should weave a beautiful pattern, and the coloring a scheme of harmony, and yet the picture should make a distinct emotional appeal. A woman, with a soul, throned amid a lower race, yet yearning for the higher spiritual fervors—that was an idea which lent itself beautifully to pictorial expression: a literary idea doubtless, but yet a visual, too, so that there was no need even to label it with the poet's lines which had suggested it; it should be self-explanatory. And what sensuous glow in the accessories—the clear, green sea-depths, the red-gold throne, the child's flowing hair! The thought of them was like wine in his veins. He set to work eagerly on a large scale, informed by his contemplation of the Old Masters with big ambitions—to do, not the little lyrics that satisfied contemporary cocksureness, but a great sustained poem.

What pleasures and pains the work brought him! The thrill of conception was deadened by inadequacy of execution, to revive when some charm of color and line flowered under happy accident. He had great joy in doing the heart of the sea with its "deep, divine, dark dayshine"—it was his sympathy with this marine fairy-land that had partly inspired his readiness to do old Coble's misleading ensign of the shark and the sponge-diver. Around the red-gold throne of the Merman's bride that stood on the sand-strewn sea-bed the submarine flora bloomed in strange, fantastic arabesques and subtle shades of amber and gray and white and crimson, and through the green translucent water, spent sunbeams quivered and gleamed, and vague tropical fish shot lovely notes of color, and a sea-snake coiled its glittering mail; and there were strange pied amorphous creatures and moss-like corallines and red-branching madrepores and gleaming shells, and mother-o'-pearl touched with purple and azure, yet all strictly subordi-

nated to the two central figures of the composition — the throned woman with her youngest on her knee, which, despite the nudity and the strange accessories, took on a curious likeness to the Madonna and Child. The canvas indeed showed the influence upon him of those wistful Madonnas he had pored over so wistfully; the cold, strange eyes of the golden-haired child were in the imaginative vein of the poem, the form of the throned woman was inspired by merely Pagan ideals of beauty; and yet the yearning in her uplifted eyes for the world of prayer whose sound floated mystically down to her was the same that showed in the eyes of the Holy Mother. But this analogy was not consciously in the artist's design, though it had doubtless influenced his choice of subject, nor, though he had certainly had in mind to suggest through her the yearning of humanity for a higher world, did he connect his work with the school of Symbolists which was just arising across the Channel, and which was capable of finding in the dominant green of his sea the color-symbol of Resurrection. Even the dead face which he had placed in a corner in the foreground, though it might well seem symbolic of the tragedy lurking amid this sensuous beauty, was in truth only the dead face of his father, and he had put it in less for its symbolic significance or its realistic appositeness than from an uncontrollable desire to have it there, as though thus to dispossess his mind of that ancient haunting image which the continuous thought of the sea had inevitably brought up again. He told himself it was but natural some drowned face should bob ghastly in this submarine paradise, but in reality he felt a morbid craving to put it there, to have something in his picture for himself alone, that no one else in the great wide world could possibly understand to the full.

For the rest the picture cost him infinite trouble, for his genius was an incapacity for not taking infinite pains. The poetry of paint is achieved by the prose of work, and as despite his Romanticism his hankerings for the Real persisted, his ambitious conception entailed much preliminary study, and the setting up in his studio of a little sea-water aquarium, in the construction of which his ancient experience at the Stepney bird-stuffing establishment in making cases of shells with

mosses and sea-weeds and coral came in unexpectedly useful. But he could not get a satisfactory model for his principal figure, and curiously enough her left hand gave him more vexation than anything else in this complex composition. He could not settle its pose, scraped out finger after finger with an old sailor's knife, relic of his mackerel-fishing voyage, specially ground down, painted out the whole hand fourteen times, and at last in despair weakly solved the problem by hiding the hand altogether. Two days later, working on the scales of the sea-snake that basked sinuously at the woman's feet, he suddenly had a last furious dash at the refractory hand. This time it came right and brought rejoicing. Sometimes he seemed at the mercy of these haphazard inspirations; what came, came, quite irrespective of conscious will and training. "Als ixh Xan" (as I can), the old Flemish motto which Van Eyck put to his work, seemed to him apt for any painter.

When he began "The Merman's Bride" he was already much more exigent towards himself than in his younger days; self-criticism had checked that fearless execution; by the time he had finished his picture, those very months of steady work, rigorously revised, had raised his ideal higher, so that though the actual picture pretty well corresponded with his first conception, it was still far removed from his later standard. The expression of the woman's face seemed especially inadequate, and as great actresses do not sit as models, and the artist has to imagine emotional expression, he felt again, despite his Romanticism, that he had missed the subtleties of reality. But every genus of art has to sacrifice something, and sending-in day was drawing swiftly nigh, and he had to lay down his brushes at last, and through his frame-maker despatch the canvas to Burlington House, and await with what composure he could the verdict that should bring him the recognition he had struggled for during such long tedious years. Now that the absorbing task was over, he had time to think of its reward, to dwell on the thought of recognition, of Fame, the one thing on earth that still loomed before him, enshrouded in vague, misty splendors. In a world of illusions, this was the solid happiness it might yet be his to grasp.

This last illusion was not destined to be dissipated yet awhile. He was sitting at the breakfast-table when he received a blue card inviting him to take back his picture. Burning with revolt and despair, he had to strive to appear calm, what time Rosina was unfolding a tale of woe concerning the maid-of-all-work, whom she had detected throwing away half-burned coals into the dust-hole. That, she reiterated monotonously, explained the mysteriously rapid disappearance of the coals—over a ton since quarter-day. An investigation of the dust-hole had revealed a veritable coal-mine. It was one of the most curious characteristics of Rosina that, with all her hardness, she flinched mentally before her servants, pouring out her grievances against them when they were out of ear-shot, so that her husband suffered vicariously for their sins of omission or commission. Usually he listened to her silently with the courteous deference he would have shown a guest, never provoked to an angry retort save by her absurd objections to his models. He had abandoned as hopeless the effort to unite their souls. But to-day he had no option but to cap her tragic narrative by telling her of his disappointment. The news excited her not to sympathy with his aspersed art, but to reproachful alarm for his pecuniary future.

This was the last straw. He might have stood out against the Academy, exhibiting elsewhere, and gradually building up an outside reputation; but the pecuniary independence to enable him to do this, which had been the main motive of his marriage, was the very thing that he now saw he must abandon. In his secret paroxysms of resentment—more against himself than against her—it became increasingly plain to him that he could not live on her money; that were intolerable to his reawakened manhood. He must make a financial success on his own account; he must become independent of her at any cost to Art. His entire preconception of his future had broken down, his marriage a failure from the financial point of view as from every other. Instead of having emancipated himself from the necessity of a monetary success, he had made life impossible without it. Well, he would compromise; he would recoil to leap the better; he would do what the public wanted, and then, having secured its attention, he would do what *he* wanted.

He went to the Academy and to the Grosvenor Gallery, he studied the most popular pictures of his day, and in a couple of large canvases—one domestic, the other Biblical—set himself to outdo them in anecdotage and obviousness of technique.

In a passion of irony he half parodied his own picture of "The Merman's Bride" in an idyllic interior called "Motherhood," representing a mother holding up a little girl, who in her turn nursed a doll. Rosina sat for this to save expense, her own little girl being now weaned. The other picture was a "Vashti," and for the repudiated queen did Rosina pose likewise, and with unwonted interest in her husband's work.

Both pictures were cleverly painted, for Matthew Strang strove to atone for his lack of interest in his subjects by painful impeccability of technique, and to Rosina's joy both won acceptance from the Hanging Committee, though at the eleventh hour—on the Saturday night before Varnishing Day—husband and wife were alike disappointed to receive an intimation that, through lack of space, only the smaller—"Motherhood"—could be hung.

Despite all his contempt for his picture and for the Academy, it was a tingling sensation to move amid the crowd of artists on Varnishing Day, and to see some whose serious faces he remembered noting on the platform on that memorable "Gold Medal Night" pause before his picture in admiration of the vigorous brush-work. This was a sign of success he was destined to experience in far greater measure the following year, but the keenness of the thrill could never be matched again.

And when "Motherhood" was mentioned in the papers, and in the early days of the Exhibition he watched fashionably clad ladies gather in front of it to commend the "sweetly pretty" child and its touching foreshadowing of maternity, Matthew Strang found himself insensibly beginning to partake in the general admiration; and with that strain of weakness which London had exposed in him from the first, he was tickled by the praise of these pretty women with their rustle of silks and their atmosphere of scent and culture, and his American birth subtly lent added spice to his sensation, in the thought of conquering with his rude home-born genius these votaries of an ele-

gant civilization. He was quite annoyed when he heard of Morrison's *mot*, that the doll was hit off to the life, but the other two figures were wooden. But it was not till "Motherhood" sold for two hundred pounds that the process of corruption really began to set in.

The buyer—a provincial cotton-spinner in town for his holiday—wished to sit for his portrait. The painter did not like to ask him to the whitewashed studio. He told Rosina they must move to a better neighborhood. The economical Rosina would not consent to quit a quarter where rates and provisions were low, and where she had by this time acquired several cronies equally martyred by their maids-of-all-work, so ultimately he took a larger studio in a more fashionable district, going to his work every day, like a clerk to his office, relieved from his wife's overpowering proximity, and from her personal vision of his models coming and going, though her morbid suspicion was always ready to flare up. Thus the estrangement had begun. People sent him cards, not knowing he was married; after some embarrassed refusals he weakly accepted, without explanation, an invitation to dinner—unable to decline it gracefully, and knowing Rosina unsuited to the company—and his reticence made subsequent explanation more and more difficult. After a still greater success in the next Academy, with an only less conventional picture, he was caught in a fashionable whirl of work and social engagements, finding commission after commission thrust upon him, driven to hasty production of imposing compositions to preserve his place in the rapidly recurrent Academy and other Exhibitions, and always postponing the time when he would start upon the real artistic work of his life, when he should have accumulated enough money to give him a couple of years of freedom for independent Art, for that fearless expression of his own individuality which alone makes Art, which alone adds aught to the world's treasure of Beauty by contributing a new individual vision of the Beautiful, and which, so far from being demanded by the paying public, must be a revelation of unknown riches.

A plethora of portrait commissions was not conducive to personal Art; people were much more clamorous for the likeness

than in the days of Sir Joshua before photography had been invented, and every artist's best portraits were always those unpaid, unchallenged portraits of his parents and friends—unflattered, yet touched with the higher beauty of truth. And portraits stood in the way of more complex work, though they got one a cheap reputation as a stylist. But there was a great run on Matthew Strang for portraits; almost as much as on one of his fellow-sufferers for marbles. The public would scarcely have anything else, and the voice of the public is the voice of the purse.

By fits and snatches he made attempts to express himself, but he never had time to find out what "himself" was. Sometimes, in a reversion to one of his earlier manners, he thought he wanted to express sensation, to transfer to the spectator of his landscape the sensation the original had given him, and from his country visits he would come back with studies of strange blue moonlight effects on cliffs, or weird dark seas, destined never to be worked up. He began a realistic picture of a winter view from Primrose Hill, with brownish trees in the foreground and gray in the background, and a white misty townlet to the left; but, fluctuating again, he abandoned it for an attempt to do the lyric of the brush, to express, as in balanced metres, harmonies of tree and sky and water, and this, again, was thrown aside for the picture of "Ideal Womanhood," which, under the influence of a beautiful woman's rebuke, he had felt was the real "himself" it behooved him to express. But the beautiful woman's passage across his horizon had been momentary, and so even this piece of imaginative art had been finished hurriedly under the pressure of other work. And thus the years flew by like months, with incredible velocity. He could not escape from the net-work of engagements he had helped to weave, nor did he always desire to. There was a circumlapping consolation about the applause of the public, though it did not warm him. He found a bitter satisfaction, as of revenge, in the smiles of society dames, though he did not court them. He took no pleasure in the personal paragraphs and the notices of his work, though he knew they were necessary to his prices, and though he had no more liking for the severe estimates of

the few who would have none of him. The breach with his wife widened imperceptibly, half involuntarily, though he was passively glad when she was not with him to complicate his life with her bourgeois ways, with her vulgar outlook.

He was driven to a more pretentious studio, which had sometimes to be the scene of responsive hospitalities, and which raised his prices. He fell into a semi-bachelor life. Late evening parties, early morning rides in the Park, visits for pleasure or portrait-painting or decoration to country houses (where his early familiarity with rod and gun gave him a valuable air of autochthonic aristocracy), excursions to Goodwood, to Henley, sketching tours, all tended to separate him from his wife, till at last an almost complete separation had grown up, so gradually that, except for her spasms of jealousy, Rosina seemed almost to have become reconciled to it in view of the popular success, the inflow of money, and the eternal economy of Camden Town, and instead of resenting his absence, to have come to welcoming his presence. When, on rare gala occasions, he took her out, the places she loved were those which no fashionable foot ever trod; and as the couple wandered—an obscure matrimonial molecule among the holiday masses—he was not sorry that his juvenile idea of fame as a blazoning *vade mecum* was only one of the many illusions of youth. And so none of the scented chattering crowd that gathered on Show Sunday before his pictures or his refreshments had any inkling of the more legitimate *ménage* in the less fashionable quarter. He absolved his occasional qualms of conscience by lavishing his earnings on her, which she hoarded—though he knew it not—partly from instinct, partly from a superstitious dread of a catastrophe when his hand should fail or her shares fall to zero. Too late he comprehended the hardness in money matters that had been at the root of her resentment against the defalcating Frenchman, and it was to spare her feelings, as well as to preserve peace, that he said never a word to her about the great sums with which he gladdened the Nova-Scotian household.

Not that Rosina knew much of his other affairs. In truth, she knew very little of her husband's life, nor by how vast a sweep it circumscribed her own. She knew he had to be away

from her a very great deal, that he had to stay in the country to paint great people; she was vaguely aware that the necessities of his profession made a wide sociality profitable. She had been once or twice to peep at his studio, horrified by the grandeur, and only consoled by the demonstration that its cost was repaid in the prices, like the luxurious fittings of the shops in the Holloway Road. But her imagination lacked the materials to construct a vision of the whirlpool which had sucked him away from her; her reading was limited to a weekly newspaper in which his name seldom appeared. And he, in his mental isolation from her, found scant self-reproach for his silence; reserve seemed more natural than communicativeness. She could never know the doings of his soul, his thoughts were not her thoughts, he had given up the attempt at communion, the effort to teach her to know his real self; why should he be less reticent concerning his outward movements, his superficial self? He was aloof from her spiritually; beside this, his material separation from her was insignificant. The children—a girl of seven and a boy of nearly four—were no bonds of union. The elder, christened Clara, after Rosina's aunt, was sharp and lively enough, but given to passionate sulking; the younger—called after his grandfather, David—was a lymphatic, colorless youngster, sickly and rather slow-witted, with something of Billy's pathos in his large gray eyes. Their father had tried hard to love them, as he had tried to love their mother, and had taken a certain proprietary interest in their infantile graces, and in the engaging ways of early childhood, but the claims of his Art left them in the mother's hands, and the older they grew the less he grew to feel them his. Neither Clara nor David had as yet displayed any scintilla of artistic instinct. When he went home he usually had something for them in his pocket, as he would have had for the children of an acquaintance, but they gave him no parental thrill.

CHAPTER II

"SUCCESS"

THE studio bell had tinkled so often that afternoon that Mr. Matthew Strang refused to budge from the comfortable arm-chair in which he sat smoking his cigarette and reading the *Nineteenth Century* after the labors of the day. The model had sipped her tea, taken her silver, and was gone to resume her well-earned place among the clothed classes, and the hard-working artist was in no mood to open his door to the latest bell-ringer.

Probably it was only another model to inquire if he had any work, or to apprise him of a change of address or of wardrobe; or else it was a *soi-disant* decayed artist, who had tramped all the way from Camberwell, ignorant that his old patron had moved from the studio a year ago; or mayhap it was a child. He had been much worried by children lately, since he had picked up a couple in the gutter and placed them on the "throne." The dingy court where the fortunate twain resided had been agitated from attic to cellar; the entire juvenile population had pulled his bell in quest of easy riches; mothers had quarrelled with one another over the chances of their young ones; the whole court had been torn with intestine war.

Ting-a-ting—ting-a-ting—ting—ting—ting—

The person had rung again, more ferociously. Ah, it must be that interminable Mrs. Filbert back again. Well, let her ring on, the old jade. Rather an hour of tintinnabulation than ten minutes of her tongue. Had his man been in, he might himself have been "out," but he could scarcely appear at the door and deny himself. Her shrill falsetto voice resurged in the ear of memory, offering nude photos from Paris at exorbitant

prices, or lists of models full of inaccurate addresses, or rare costumes, most of which could be picked up at any old clo' shop. He smiled, recalling one of these costumes—something like a fishing-net with holes about an inch across. "This is Greek, and shows the figure." Certainly it showed the figure, he thought, smiling more broadly. And now he remembered—she had threatened to bring her younger sister. "And I have also a little sister. I don't know if you paint pretty girls," here his memory inserted a giggle. "She sits for modern dress or the head. Not for the figure. Of course she doesn't mind a light costume, something diaphanous. Though I'm not quite sure she has any time left. She is always with Mr. Rapper, who does those pastels for the Goupil Art Gallery. He is so very sweet to her. She goes to the theatre and dines with him. I sit myself sometimes, though you mightn't think so" (giggle). "So of course she can't sit in the evening, in case you want her for black and white." ("Just like a woman," he reflected, cynically, "too careless to take the trouble to discover that I am far too eminent for black and white.") "I know I'm dressed carelessly just now, I really must be more careful" (giggle). "I have an Empire gown to sit in, very sweet. I will bring it you to look at."

Ting-a-ting-ting-a-ting-ting-ting-ting-ting-ting.

Yes, it was the sweet Empire gown she was bringing him if it was not her sweeter sister. His experienced eye foresaw the Empire gown—something cut by herself out of muslin, with an old yellow silk sash. He let the last vibration of the bell-wire die away; the creature would know now he was not in. The smoke curled in a blue-gray cloud about his head, as, looking up from the page of the magazine, he gazed dreamily at his half-finished picture, standing on the easel at the other extremity of the great luxurious room, where the westering sun of June sent down a flood of light that brightened the gleam of the gold frames of hanging pictures, touched up rough sketches and preliminary studies standing about, and lay in a splash of brilliancy among the sheets of music and the dainty volumes of poetry and *belles-lettres* on the grand piano. Suddenly, as his gaze rested with a suspicion of wistfulness

on this doubly artistic interior, in which the pictures were only pleasant spots of color in a larger harmony, a harmony of rugs and flowers and tapestry and picturesque properties and bric-à-brac, there shot up in his mind an image of an ancient episode. He saw himself, a shy, homely figure, standing in despairing bitterness on the threshold of an elegant studio—though not so elegant nor so commodious as this—the studio of the brilliant cousin whose life had intersected his own so many years ago. His face changed, a sad smile hovered about the corners of his mouth. Perhaps some unhappy young man was now outside his own less hospitable door, growing hopeless as the echoes alone answered him. He started up hastily, and hurrying into the passage drew back the handle of the door. A slim, fashionably attired gentleman, who was just walking off down the gravel pathway, turned, hearing the sound of the open door, his handsome, clean-shaven, bronzed face radiating joyous amusement.

"You duffer!" he exclaimed.

The famous painter turned pale. His cigarette fell from his mouth, so startled was he. That he should have just been thinking of Herbert Strang seemed almost supernatural. But the nervous feeling was submerged in a wave of happiness; to have Herbert again was an incredible bliss. How lucky he had opened the door!

"Herbert!" he cried, seizing his cousin's delicately gloved hands with an affectionate impulsiveness worthy of Herbert's mother.

Herbert surveyed him roguishly. "You're a nice old pal to make me ring three times. What's going on inside?"

"Nothing at all," laughed the painter, in effusive happiness. "Only tea, and that's cold. But come in."

"You're sure I'm not disturbing you," said Herbert, mischievously.

"No, I'm all by myself."

"It must be awfully convenient to have a back door," murmured Herbert.

The painter shook his head. "You haven't changed one bit," he said, in laughing reproach, as they moved within.

"Oh, but you have," said Herbert, pausing in the doorway to take him by the shoulders, and looking affectionately into his face. "Why, there's quite a dash of gray in your hair. You must have been killing yourself with work."

And, indeed, there were lines of premature age on the handsome face, too, though the rather tall, sturdy figure was still alert and unbent. The dark eyes had lost something of their old softness, the light of dream was rarer in them, but the little tangle of locks on his forehead still co-operated with the dark brown mustache and the smoothness of the firm chin to suggest the artist behind the practical man of the world.

"You forget I'm getting old," he replied, only half jocosely.

"What nonsense! Why, I'm several years older than you."

"No, are you?"

"Of course I am. Don't you remember I was your senior, instructing you in the ways of this wicked world?"

"Well, you're still looking a boy, anyhow," said Mr. Strang.

"That's what I want to look," said Herbert, laughing. "It makes pretty women pet you and hold your hand. Why, in Italy I was the envy of all the cavaliers. *Per Dio*, this is a change!" he exclaimed, as he entered the fashionable studio. "Do you remember the time you came to me and wanted to borrow tenpence, or something? Ha, ha, ha! Not that I'm surprised, old boy, not a bit. I've heard your name come up quite half a dozen times in the few days I've been back in stony old London. No, thanks, I'll sit on the couch. It's cooler there. And I won't have any cold tea in this frightfully hot weather. I'm still faithful to soda-and-whiskey, if you've got any."

"Lots," said Mr. Strang. "A cigar?"

"Not before dinner, thanks. I don't mind a cigarette. But I'm not interrupting your work?"

"Don't be ridiculous, old fellow. The idea of my turning you away!"

"Well, considering you nearly did it! But you're a celebrity now. Your time's valuable."

"Oh, but I've struck work for to-day."

"What, with all this light left? This is indeed a change from the tenpenny days."

"Yes, I suppose one gets tired," the painter sighed. "Do you like Turkish or Egyptians?"

"In cigarettes Turkish, in women Egyptians," he answered, laconically. "But what a joke to find you tired of painting! You're beginning to feel like I felt, eh? That it's one demnition grind. And I'm tired of travelling, and wouldn't mind doing a little painting now, ha, ha, ha! How funnily things do turn out, to be sure. Why, you've changed inside almost as much as outside," he said, looking up languidly into his host's face, as he selected a cigarette from the box. "I wonder if I should have recognized you if I had met you in the streets instead of tracking the lion to his own den. I shouldn't have thought half a dozen years would have made such a difference."

"Half a dozen years! It's nearer ten since we met."

"Nearer ten? Is it possible? Let me see. It must be quite seven years since the governor died, poor old chap. We haven't met since then, have we?"

"No," said the painter.

"No, of course; I've been careering about the world ever since. You know he died in Egypt?"

"No, I didn't know that," said Mr. Strang. "I only heard of his death from the dealer who took over the connection."

"Yes, he had to go there pretty sharp for his lungs, and I was compelled to leave Paris in my second year to go with him and the mater. But he died happy. That blessed gold medal of mine made him sure the name of Strang would be immortal in the history of Art. I always said there was a certain pathos about the poor old gentleman. But perhaps his assurance wasn't so wrong after all, because *you* are going to make the name glorious, aren't you, you lucky beggar! And his own name, too; which ought to make him happy, even in heaven."

The great man smiled sadly, but he only said, "And your mother—how is she? I've often wished to see her again."

"Oh, she's living now at Lyons with some distant relatives of hers. Of course, she soon tired of gadding about with me. She sent me a cutting about you once from a French paper. So you see how your fame has spread! I've often been meaning to write to you, but you know how it is, always moving about, and

I always intended to look you up when I came to London. I was here two years ago on a flying visit, but some paper said you were in Rome. Yes, and I saw a colored reproduction of a picture of yours, 'Motherhood,' decorating a miner's cabin in the Rockies—the Christmas supplement of the *Illustrated London News*, if I remember aright. It was a mother nursing a little girl, while the kid herself nursed a doll."

The painter turned away and struck a match.

"And then there were a couple of years before your father died," he said. "The last time we met was at the Students' Club in Seven Dials on Gold Medal Night."

"Yes, by Jove, you're right," said Herbert, thoughtfully. "If I didn't wish to avoid a platitude I should say that time flies. It's been a jolly good time, though, for me, with nothing to do except spend the poor old governor's savings, and a jolly big hole I've knocked in them, too. And *you* haven't come out of it so badly, eh? That's a stunning thing of yours in the Academy. Aren't you glad I made you promise to send a picture to it in those tenpenny times? I've just come from there. Got your address from the catalogue. I congratulate you heartily. It's not the sort of thing I expected from you; but it's well put in, and I suppose it pays. It is astonishing," he went on, after pausing to sip from his glass, "how paltry English art looks to me after all these years and seeing everything everywhere. The picture of the year is exactly like the lid of a bon-bon box. There aren't half a dozen things in to-day's show that I'd care to look at again. *You're* in the running, don't look so glum, ha, ha, ha! Frankly, old man, your 'Triumph of Bacchus' is jolly good work. You know I never cared much for subject, but the modelling is A 1, and that sunlight effect is ripping! And what a crowd there was before it! Phew! I nearly got suffocated trying to see it, and I had to retire to the Architectural Room to cool. I don't like Cornpepper's picture one bit, though he *is* an A.R.A."

"You mean *because* he is," said Matthew Strang, with melancholy facetiousness.

"No, nothing of the kind; that rather prejudices me in his favor. You mustn't forget I prophesied it. You don't mean

to say you admire his 'Ariadne in Naxos'? 'Poached lady on greens,' I marked it in my catalogue. Do laugh! You look as dull and faded as an Old Master. I think I shall have to restore you. Here, have some whiskey yourself. You're damned unsociable."

"I rarely drink," the host said, feebly.

"You used to drink my whiskey," Herbert reminded him, and as he poured himself out a little in deference to his brilliant cousin, he thought how queerly things had inverted themselves.

"The Triumph of Bacchus," said Herbert, laughing. "Now I've put in the good spirit, I'll exorcise the bad, as David did to Saul." And crossing over to the piano he played a lively air.

"I picked up that from a Spanish gypsy," he said. "Not George Eliot's. But I'm sinking to puns. It's the English climate. You've got no wit here, and there isn't even a word for *esprit*. Let's examine your pictures. Ha! Hum! I see you've got quite a number on your hands. I suppose they must be the good ones. Ah! What do you call that thing—the lady in blue and the harp?"

"'Ideal Womanhood,'" answered the painter, adding, hastily: "It's just been returned from Australia. I lent it to an international exhibition. They beguiled me with the prospect it would be bought by the Government."

"Ideal moonshine, I should call it," laughed Herbert. "There never was such moonlight on sea or land. And does the ideal woman play the harp on snowy mountain-tops at midnight without a chaperon?"

"It's supposed to be symbolic, you know, of her inspiring man to nobler heights," explained the artist, with an embarrassed air.

He wondered vaguely what had become of that beautiful woman—what was her name?—whose casual words at a garden-party had driven him back for a time into what he thought was the true path of his Art.

"Dear me. There's quite a mystic feeling about it. Isn't that the right phrase? Do you know, I'm seriously thinking of becoming an art critic. Yes, really! As I told you, I've had my fill of travelling, and now I'm going to try and settle down

here, and I rather like getting a reputation for something or other. It makes real woman more interested in one. The only thing I'm afraid of is, I know too much about the subject, and have actually handled the brush. I'm going to paint, too, but I've neglected to keep my hand in, so I've not much hopes of that. Unless I came out as a stylist, who sees the world as he fails to paint it. You've got several new men like that, I hear. There's money in myopia and diseases of the eye generally. And *per Dio!* how photography has come along since I was one of the pioneers of its use in art!"

Matthew Strang shrugged his shoulders.

"What does it matter?" he said, wearily. "The whole thing's a farce."

"Here, I say, must I play another gypsy dance? I came here expecting to find you a harmony in gold, and lo! you're a discord in the blues. What's the matter with you? You're jealous of Cornpepper. How is it they haven't made you an A.R.A. yet? Don't you go out enough?"

The painter's lips essayed a melancholy smile.

"I go out all I want to."

"There are enough cards stuck over your mantel."

"Yes, I have to go out a good deal in the season. It doesn't pay to offend patrons."

"Or Ideal Womanhood. I reckon you'll be making a fine marriage one of these days when you're an A.R.A., as you must be. Lady Bettina Modish, or something of that sort, eh?"

"Won't you have another cigarette?" said the painter, jerkily.

"Thanks. Oh, by-the-way, ha, ha, ha! What's become of that woman, you rogue?"

"What woman?"

"Real womanhood. The woman you were living with in Paris. Ha, ha, ha! You didn't think I knew that. But I met Cornpepper there on my return from Egypt, and he told me he'd seen you going about with her. How we laughed over our Methodist parson, who wanted art to be moral! What's the matter?"

The painter's face had grown white and agitated.

"I'm sorry if I've said anything to annoy you," Herbert protested. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have given Cornpepper away. But the affair is so ancient. I didn't know you'd mind a reference to it now."

"The woman I was living with in Paris," said Matthew Strang, hoarsely, "was my wife."

"Non—sense," said Herbert, in low, long-drawn incredulity. But his cousin's face was only too convincing.

"She's not alive now?" he asked.

The painter nodded his head hopelessly.

Herbert sprang to his feet.

"Good God!" he said. "You don't mean to say you were such an ass as to marry! No wonder you're in the blues."

Matthew Strang was silent. There was a painful pause.

"But you've kept it pretty dark," Herbert said, at last. "Everybody seems to look upon you as a bachelor."

"I know," replied the painter. "I've always lived a lonely life, and I don't speak about my affairs."

"I'm sorry I touched upon them, then."

"No. I can talk with *you*."

"Thanks, old man." And Herbert took his friend's hand and pressed it sympathetically. "You're not living with her, anyhow, and that's something."

"Oh, but I *am* living with her—at least, I go home sometimes. It's not quite my fault—it's grown up gradually. She lives in Camden Town."

"Alone?"

"Oh no! There's Billy—that's my young brother—to keep her company. And then there's the children."

"What! kids as well?"

"Only two."

Herbert looked glum. "I suppose she's an impossible person," he said.

"Do you mean to live with?"

"No, to be seen with."

"We've never been out together in London," replied the painter, simply. "We drifted apart before I was asked out. Oh, but it's no use going into it—it's all too sordid."

"Poor chap!" said Herbert. "Well, you may rely on my respecting your confidence. I suppose it *is* a secret?"

"It seems to be. I make none of it, except negatively. You will find Mrs. Strang in the directory as a householder in Camden Town; she took the house, as it happened. She has a little money of her own."

Herbert smiled sadly. "That's what I always say. The safest secret in the world is the open secret. If you had hidden her away in Patagonia, or tried to put her into a lunatic asylum, it would have been the talk of the town. As you simply let her live quietly in the heart of London, nobody's provoked into inquisitiveness, and if anybody knows—as no doubt an odd person does here and there—he doesn't tell anybody else because he doesn't know it's a secret. I shouldn't be surprised to hear the marriage was duly advertised in the first column of the *Times*."

Mr. Matthew Strang's smile faintly reflected his cousin's. "No, we were married in Nova Scotia," he replied. "But what are you doing to-night?"

"How improbable life is," mused Herbert. "Only yesterday I heard that Jackson, the Cabinet Minister, has been secretly married these last twenty years. What am I doing to-night? Oh, nothing particular. I thought of dropping into a music-hall. I can't stand the English theatre. It's so unintellectual."

"Well, why not dine with me at the Limners'?"

"Sure you haven't got any other engagement?" And Herbert peered curiously at the large chalked-over engagement slate hung on the wall.

"Oh, I said I would dine *en famille* at Lady Conisbrooke's, but I can easily send a wire. As it isn't a formal dinner-party, and as I'm rather a privileged person with her, I dare say she'll forgive me."

"It's awfully naughty of you," said Herbert. "But then, there, you're a genius! And it *would* be jolly to dine together as in the days of auld lang syne. I've got an awful lot to yarn about, and so have you. I'll rush to my rooms and dress."

"Oh, why bother to dress? Though *I* must, if you don't mind. I've got to go on to one or two places. If you don't

mind waiting a few minutes while I wash my brushes and put on my war-paint, we can go at once. Unless you're too fashionable to dine prematurely."

"No, but I think I'd rather dress. It's cooler in this frightful weather. Shall I come back or meet you at the club?"

"As you like."

"Well, you go on to the club, and I'll be there just as quick as I can. Oh, by-the-way, write out that wire, and I'll send it for you."

"Thanks; perhaps you had better, though I expect my man back in a few minutes. He's seeing about the delivery of a picture to the London agents of the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition."

When Herbert was gone Matthew Strang did not at once mount to his dressing-room. The advent of this visitor from the past had stirred up all its muddy depths, and the knowledge that he had a little time to spare kept him brooding over it all, recalling the episodes of their *camaraderie;* and blended with them, as faded scents with old letters, he caught faint, elusive whiffs of that freshness of feeling and aspiration which had impregnated them in those dear, divine days of youth, when even his darkest hours were tinged with a rose-light of dawn. Never again would he feel that glow, that fervor, those strange stirrings of romance, that delicious sadness sweeter than all mirth, when a perfect blue day could bring tears to the eyes, and the melancholy patter of rain at twilight was like a dying fall of music, and something strange and far away subtly interfused itself with the loveliness of nature, with flowers and sunsets and summer nights, a haunting grace, intangible, inexpressible, hinting somehow of divine archetypes of beauty in some celestial universe.

No; even his spasmodic strivings to escape from the rut of false Art were becoming fewer and farther between. Perhaps he was not a genius, after all, he had begun to think. Why should he vex himself? That sentiment of Constable at which he had winced when he first came across it, "People may say what they like of my art, what I know is that it is *my* art," was losing its power to sting. The stirrings of his astral self were

subsiding. He felt himself hardening steadily into a mere unit of the Club world of tired and successful men, who, having blunted their emotions by heavy feeding of all their appetites, could no longer feel the primal things, taking even their vices with the joyless sobriety of virtue. And though he himself was temperate enough and had not been unfaithful to Rosina, but only to the spirit of the marriage contract, yet this same drought of feeling, this furred tongue of the emotional being, was becoming unpleasantly familiar.

As he sat now moodily reviewing the situation he burst into a spasmodic, bitter laugh. It had struck him for the first time that his life had come to be not unlike his father's—a life apart from his wife's, with a rare stay under the domestic roof, the wife the more amiable for his absences. A sudden intuition seemed a flash-light on his father's past. He felt drawn to the dead sailor with a new sympathy. He rose in agitation, extending his arms towards a visionary form.

"Father, father!" he cried aloud. "Did you suffer like me?"

"Did you call, sir?" And Claydon, his man-servant, who had come in quietly through the back door, descended from the bedroom, where he had been laying out his master's things.

"Yes," said his master. "Is my shaving-water ready? I'm going out a little earlier than usual."

"Yes, sir." And the painter, recalled to reality, hastened to perform his toilet. But his mind still ran in the grooves of the past, remote from all the new interests and distractions of a brilliant career.

When he sprang from the hansom and walked through the door of the Limners' Club, he remembered that this was the very club he had come to on his first day in London—nay, that the gray-headed, deferential door-keeper was the very man whose majesty had chilled him. He wondered now whether the old fellow ever connected the popular painter with the homely, diffident youth who had inquired for Mr. Matthew Strang.

"Gentleman waiting for you, sir."

Curious! Now it was Herbert that was waiting for Mr. Matthew Strang.

But the thought of the whirligig of time gave him no pleas-

ure. In his early struggles in London, when no one would buy his work, he had gloated in anticipation over the humility of the dealers when he should have made his position; now he had long since forgotten and forgiven their contempt; how could they know he was worth taking up? There was nothing but the palest shadow of satisfaction in the thought that they would scour London in search of those despised pictures if they only knew. He wondered sometimes if those early things of his would ever come up into the light, whether the daughter of his ancient landlady still treasured her mother's wedding-present, and what had become of "The Paradise of the Birds."

A bluff graybeard in the hall shook his hand heartily. It was Erle-Smith. Matthew Strang knew now that Erle-Smith, whom he had imagined to pass his days encamped before the beatific vision, was a jolly good fellow with sheaves of amusing anecdotes. But he remembered the first time Erle-Smith had spoken to him—at a City banquet in the beginnings of his fame.

"We oldsters will have to be looking to our laurels," he had said, placing his hand on the young man's shoulder. After the banquet Erle-Smith had given him a lift in his open carriage, and as they rolled through the busy, flashing London night a voice in Matt's breast kept crying out, "This is Erle-Smith! Look! This is the great Erle-Smith I am driving with. Why don't you look, you stupid multitudes? Do you not know this is Erle-Smith—Erle-Smith himself?" Oh, why did not some of the people who knew Matthew Strang come along and see him driving with Erle-Smith? Perhaps they did—there must surely be one acquaintance, at least, among all those crowds, and he would tell the others. He had scarcely been able to reply rationally to Erle-Smith's conversation, so intoxicated was he by the great man's proximity. And now he himself was a popular celebrity — shown with the finger — on the eve of Academic honors; had he not, of all the younger men among the guests, been called upon (with disconcerting unexpectedness) to respond to a toast at the Academy Greenwich Dinner only last month? Was he not already on the Council of minor artistic societies? Yes; doubtless he himself was already the cause of like foolish flutterings in the breasts of youthful hero-worshippers — he

whose heart could no longer flutter, not even when the youthful hero-worshipper was a woman and beautiful.

He dined with Herbert at a little table. His burst of communicativeness had exhausted itself, and he was glad to let the returned traveller do the bulk of the talking as well as of the dining. He himself ate little, though the cuisine was excellent, and the cellar took high rank. Over dinner Herbert bubbled over in endless reminiscences of the rare dishes and vintages he had consumed, the operas and symphonies he had heard, the women who had loved him—a veritable rhapsody of wine, woman, and song. In an access of unmalicious bitterness, like that which had overcome him on the threshold of Herbert's studio, Matthew Strang felt that Herbert was the real Master—the Master of life.

In the smoking-room other men gathered round. There was Grose, whose colossal canvases were exhibited at a shilling a head with explanatory pamphlets by high ecclesiastical authorities, and there was Thornbury, who succeeded him in the same gallery with colossal nudes that needed no explanation from ecclesiastical authorities.

Matthew introduced Herbert to Trapp, the realistic novelist, and Herbert introduced Matthew to Sir Frederick Boyd, the composer, who related with gusto a story of how he had exposed a cheat at Monte Carlo. A Scotch landscape-painter asked Matthew to recommend him a model. Two Associates joined the group. One was a vigorous painter who painted everything *à premier coup*, the other was Cornpepper, externally unchanged, save for a round beard.

He had long since cut himself adrift from the Azure Art Club, though he still counted his disciples, whose experimental fumblings in development of his methods he boasted of observing in sapient passivity. "Try it on the dog," he used to chuckle to his familiars. "I've done searching—let my imitators search, and risk the bogs and the blind-alleys. If they do strike a path, I'm on the spot instantly to lead them along it. That's the only way one can learn from one's followers." He used to tell with glee how one of them had ruined a picture by putting it out in the rain to mellow it. "Some of those modern

"MATT DINED WITH HERBERT AT A LITTLE TABLE"

stylists who are trying to discount Old Mastership will survive their pictures," was Cornpepper's commentary on a phase of the newer art. "They will leave masterpieces of invisibility."

A good many changes had taken place in the Art world since Matthew Strang had first had the felicity of drinking whiskey in Cornpepper's studio. The flowing tide was now with the decorative artists, of whom the "Mack" of that evening had proved a pioneer; the Fishtown school of photographic realism had lived long enough to be orthodox; the Azure Art Club itself was half absorbed by the Academy, and a new formula of revolt was momently expected on the horizon; some said it was to be Primitive, others mysteriously whispered "spots"; to-night Herbert, with mock seriousness, announced that he himself was about to lead a movement, the originality of which consisted in seeing Nature through stained glass. What weird magic a landscape gained when observed through a green or pink window! But he found the men not so willing to talk of principles as in the days of Cornpepper's Bohemian parties, when Carrie with the whiskey bottle stood for the sober club attendant with his tray of liqueur brandies. The conversation was rigidly concrete, except for a moment when Cornpepper nearly came to hot words with the photographic painter who insisted that Nature was always beautiful. The little man, glaring through his monocle and rasping the plush arm-chair with his nails, insisted that this was sheer cant, one had only to look in the glass to see how ugly Nature could sometimes be! Selection was the only excuse for Art. Random transcripts from Nature were as foolish as the excesses of the Neo-Japanese school, into which the Azure Art Gallery had degenerated. But this lapse of Cornpepper's into his early manner was brief. Recovering himself, he told a malicious anecdote about an artist who was taking to etching because his eyesight was failing, and he explained the domesticity of British Art by the objection of artists' wives to all models except babies. Everybody knew, he said, why Carruthers had been driven to landscape and Christmas supplements. "Depend upon it," dogmatized the little man with his most owlish air of wisdom, "the man who marries his model is lost. She will never tolerate a model on the premises again."

His fellow-Associate told a story of a stock-broker who had got himself invited to the Greenwich dinner last year, and had asked Erle-Smith to give him the sketch of passing barges which the great man had pencilled on his sketch-book after dinner. "Erle-Smith good-naturedly gave it to him. This year he was there again, and said with proud respect to Erle-Smith, 'I've still got that sketch.' And produced it *crumpled up* from his waistcoat pocket!"

"Yes, but did you hear Vanbrugh's *mot?*" asked Trapp. "He said, 'Naturally; being a financier he doubled it.'"

"Why, I said that!" cried Cornpepper, angrily.

"No doubt," said Herbert. "It's a well-known chestnut."

"Then I pulled it out of the fire," screamed Cornpepper.

Somebody exhibited another sketch, grotesquely indecorous, by a popular painter of religious masterpieces, and the latest epigram on the divorce case of the hour was repeated and enjoyed. But Matthew Strang's laughter held no merriment.

"Shall you be at the Academy *soirée?*" he asked Trapp, to turn the conversation.

"No, I don't care for crowds," replied the realistic novelist.

The conversation rambled on. The composer drifted away, and a full-fledged Academician took his place—an elderly, dandified figure with a languid drawl, an aristocratic manner caught from his sitters, and a shoulder-shrugging contempt for Continental Art; in despite of which Matthew Strang protested mildly against the bad hanging at Burlington House of a portrait by an eminent Frenchman. Cornpepper talked of a sale at Christie's at which most of the pictures had fetched lower prices than was given for them by their last owners.

"It's all a spec'," said Herbert; "there's no such thing as a fixed value in a work of art. Everything depends on the artist's pose. The more the buyer gives for a picture the more he likes it. It's a game of brag. Set up a fine establishment—the dealer will pay. My old governor was a good deal taken in by pretentious humbugs with pals in the press." As the Academician's own establishment was notoriously finer than his pictures—a fact of which the wandering Herbert was ignorant—Matthew Strang hastened to speak of Tarmigan, who had been recalled to mem-

ory by the catalogue of the aforesaid sale. "I'm afraid he's gone under, poor fellow," he said. "I've tried to come across him, but he was always a mysterious person."

But Cornpepper continued to talk of the sale, of the fluctuations of prices; of the impoverished condition of the market, so menacing to young artists who had set up fashionable establishments on the strength of their first sales; of the potentialities of America, that yet undiscovered continent, till all the tide of secret bitterness welled up in a flood from the depths of Matthew Strang's soul. Money! Money! Money! He had never really escaped from it. What a mirage Art was! Even success only brought the same preoccupations with prices, it was all the old sordidness over again on a higher plane. The ring of the gold was the eternal undertone, bringing discord into every harmony. With a public ignorant of what Art meant, conceiving it as something rigid like science, not as the expression of the temperament, technique, and vision of individual genius; with a public craving for pictorial platitudes; Art could not be, and was not, produced, save by a martyr here and there. Everywhere the counting of pieces and the shuffling of bank-notes! The complacent Academician irritated him; he was tired of reading of his marble halls, the vassals and serfs at his side, his garden parties, his Belgravian palace erected on the ruins of a forgotten bankruptcy. The fumes of expensive wines and cigars gave him a momentary vertigo.

"For God's sake, stop talking shop!" he burst out suddenly.

The astonished Cornpepper let his eye-glass fall.

"Have you gone crazy, Strang?" he asked, witheringly. "What do you join an artists' club for, if you don't want to talk shop? Strikes me you'd better get yourself put up for the Commercial Travellers' Union."

"That's what we are," retorted Matthew Strang.

The Scotch landscape-painter pacified them by proposing a game of "shell-out," and Herbert eagerly seconding the proposal it was carried *nem. con.*, and the group mounted to the billiard-room, where Matthew Strang won half a crown before he went off to his nocturnal parties, leaving his cousin still renewing with zest his olden experience of the lighter side of British Art.

CHAPTER III

"VAIN-LONGING"

As a matter of habit Mr. Matthew Strang went, some weeks later, to the Academy Soirée to add his handshake to the many suffered by the presidential image of patience at the top of the stairs, and to help appease the insatiable appetite of the crowd of Christians to whom lions are thrown. It was part of his success to move through fluttering drawing-rooms, and it imbittered him to feel that the average admirer conceives the artist as living in a world of beautiful dreams, sweet with the incense of perpetually swung censers, and knows nothing of the artist's agonies, or the craftsman's sweatings, that go to the making of beautiful things; sees always the completed design, and never the workman scraping the paint or wetting the back of the canvas or tossing sleeplessly under the weight of a ruined picture.

To-night, in the restless dissatisfaction that had grown upon him since the reappearance of Herbert had undammed a flood of ancient memories, this feeling possessed him more strongly than ever, inspiring a morbid resentment of the chattering crew divided between hero-worship and champagne-cup. There was almost a suspicion of a leonine snarl in the stereotyped answer, "You are very kind to say so," which he gave to the grimacing persons who buttonholed him to bask in the radiance of his success or to effuse honest admiration. Everybody seemed to him ill-dressed, ill-mannered, and in ill-health. He thought he had never seen so many cadaverous complexions, snag teeth, powder-tipped noses, scraggy shoulders, glazed eyes (with pince-nez, monocle, or spectacles), ungainly figures (squat or slim), queer costumes, bald heads, or top-heavy hair-dressings; how

horrible gentlefolk were, more uncouth even than the denizens of the slums! Those one could imagine to be a very different breed, cleaned and properly clothed, but these had had every chance. How poorly humanity compared with cows and horses; what a price man had paid for soul—and without always getting it. Surely, none but custom-blinded eyes could gaze unblinking, unsmiling, at the grotesque show of mankind, the quaint crania, the unsightly bodies; the crowd struck him as the inventions of a comic draughtsman in a malicious mood, the men in black and white, the ladies in color. And, indeed, though he was not thinking of himself, his stalwart, well-proportioned figure and his handsome head stood out notably from a serried batch of degenerate physiques.

" So you are determined to cut me, Mr. Strang?"

The painter started violently as the laughing syllables, sounding far more musical than the faint far-away strains of the band in the Sculpture Room, vibrated above the endless buzz of the crowd that hemmed him in.

He looked up. His moody fit vanished before the radiant apparition of a beautiful woman in a shimmering amber gown from which her shoulders rose dazzling. A jewelled butterfly fluttered at her breast. In the twinkling of an eye—and that eye hers—he recanted his contempt for the Creator's draughtsmanship.

" I have bowed to you three times," she said, and the twinkling of her eye—large and gray and lambent—was supplemented by the smile that hovered about the corners of her wide sweet mouth. " But you won't take any notice of me."

" I beg your pardon," he said, in flushed embarrassment, " I must have been lost in thought."

She shook her head bewitchingly.

" You don't remember me. Celebrities never do remember people, though people always remember celebrities."

" I do remember you," he protested, chords of memory vibrating tremulously and melodiously. " I had the pleasure of meeting you at a garden-party some years ago."

" But you don't remember my name?"

" I don't think I caught it then," he said, simply. " But I

remember you scolded me because my pictures were only beautiful."

She laughed gayly.

"Ah, then I ought to apologize to you. I have changed my mind."

"Now you don't think they're even that!"

"Far from it! What I mean is that I have come to think less of useful things. You know I was a Socialist then. But let me introduce my friend to you."

"You have to introduce yourself first, Nor," said a younger lady whom he then perceived at her side.

He smiled.

"You are irrepressible, Olive," said her friend. "Mr. Strang, let me introduce myself then—Mrs. Wyndwood."

He bowed, still smiling.

"Eleanor Wyndwood," she added, "to explain my friend's abbreviation, which always puzzles strangers."

"Everybody knows Nor stands for Eleanor," remonstrated her friend. "Do they suppose your name is Norval?"

Mrs. Wyndwood's smile met the painter's.

"And now, if my punctilious friend is satisfied, let me introduce Miss Regan."

Miss Regan gave him her hand cordially.

"Where are your pictures to be found, Mr. Strang?" she asked. "We haven't been to the Academy before, and we should so like to save the shilling."

"Oh, they're not worth looking at," he said, uncomfortably. He suddenly felt ashamed of them. It was thus that he had felt more than two years ago, when, over her strawberries and cream, Mrs. Wyndwood had lectured him for artistic aloofness from the travail of the time, insisting that it was the mission of all forms of Art to express the aspiration of the century towards a higher and juster social life, towards the coming of God's kingdom on earth, and that it would be honester for him to plough the land than to paint decorative pictures for the dining-rooms of capitalists. He had scarcely taken in her point of view, more persuaded by her presence than by her words, by some intangible radiation of earnestness and goodness from the

lovely face and the soulful gray eyes, and less ashamed of the sinfulness of his own artistic standpoint than of the often meretricious quality of his performance. She had been the first woman to speak slightingly of his rôle in the world, and her dispraise, co-operating, as it did, with his own discontent, had impressed him more than all the praise, just as one unfavorable newspaper critique rankled, while a hundred eulogies passed across consciousness, scarcely ruffling its waves.

When the flux of the garden-party had drifted her off in the wake of Gerard Brode, the handsome young Socialist, he had felt that he, too, might have become a Socialist or a ploughboy, or even an honest painter, under the inspiration of her enthusiastic eyes. He had thought of her for several months, almost as a creature of dream, so swift and shadowy had been her flitting across his horizon, and she had easily lent herself to that conception of Ideal Womanhood which the world had not yet destroyed, because the world had not created it. It was under the impulsion of the eloquent play of light across her face that he had conceived and painted that allegory of woman's inspiration which Herbert, unable to read in it the pathetic expression of the painter's dissatisfaction at once with real womanhood and his own work, had found so amusing, and he was startled now to see how nearly he had reproduced her traits in his conception of the figure on the mountain-top; not so much, perhaps, in the features, in which the slight upward tilt of the nose was omitted and the size of the ears diminished, as in the clustering chestnut hair, with gold lights in it, and in the poise of the head, the long, thin Botticelli hands, the small feet, and the graceful curves of the rather tall form, and, above all, in the expression that seemed to suffuse her face with spiritual effluence. The first impression renewed itself in all its depth; he asked himself with amazement how he could have let the waves of life wash it away so completely that even Herbert's inquiry about the picture had not recalled her clearly to his memory.

"Oh, but I want to see your pictures," she said. "There's a 'Triumph of Bacchus,' I hear. I saw the fresco—by Caracci, wasn't it?—in the Farnese Palace, in Rome, on our homeward journey. We've been in Russia, Miss Regan and I, with Mon-

sieur and Madame Dolkovitch, to see Podnieff in his dairy-farm. Oh! he's so charming—so simple and saintly. He enables one to construct St. Francis of Assisi."

"He makes very bad butter," said Miss Regan.

"He is the greatest spiritual force in Russia," Mrs. Wyndwood said, sweetly. "And Dolkovitch is doing much to extend his influence in England. I wish you knew Dolkovitch, Mr. Strang."

"Why, would he make me do better pictures?" he asked, playfully, struggling a little against the obsession of her sweet seriousness.

"I will reserve my opinion till I have seen your latest manner. Though I confess I don't find the title, 'The Triumph of Bacchus,' a hopeful augury of noble work. But do tell me where it is — or must I consult the catalogue? Miss Regan made me bring one."

"It is in this very room."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's rather a compliment. The Academicians generally reserve the big room—or at least the line—for their own works. But it is cruel of you to leave me so soon."

"How subtle, Nor," said Miss Regan. "Of course he cannot be seen looking at his own picture."

"Do let us go where the crowd is thinner," he pleaded.

"Than round your picture?" queried Miss Regan, naïvely.

"For shame, Olive," laughed Mrs. Wyndwood. "I shall punish you by not letting you see it. We are at your service, Mr. Strang. Show us what you please."

"May I not get you any refreshment?" he said, as they passed into the smaller room, and into a perceptibly cooler atmosphere.

"No, thank you; this is refreshing enough," said Mrs. Wyndwood, with a sigh of relief.

"Mrs. Wyndwood means that she lives on air," said her friend.

"Oh, Olive, I eat quite as much as you."

"You used to before you developed this Dolkovitch phase, and began understudying an angel."

Matthew saw the opportunity for a commonplace compliment,

but he did not take it. The plane on which Mrs. Wyndwood existed demanded reverential originality. Every word she said sounded magically musical, and delightfully wise and witty. Olive's remarks one merely smiled at, though she, too, had a low voice, " that excellent thing in woman," and was considered handsome by those she did not annoy. She reminded the painter of a Caryatid as she stood there, rather more sturdy than her friend, and shorter, with stronger features and a firmer chin, but to the full as graciously proportioned. She had dark hair and eyes, and a warm coloring that reached its most vivid tint in the intense red of the lips. Her dress was of a soft green-blue, cut high, with yellow roses at the throat, and but for the painter's preoccupation with her friend, would have challenged his eye by subtle harmonies.

" There goes William Lodge, the poet," cried Mrs. Wyndwood, suddenly.

" Impossible !" said Olive.

" But it is the poet," insisted Mrs. Wyndwood.

" Impossible," repeated Olive. " No man can be a poet with mutton-chop whiskers."

" What has the man's appearance to do with his poetry ?"

" Everything. Mutton chops and lyrics don't rhyme—they're like that woman's emeralds against her turquoise bodice. A poet's publisher should keep him out of sight — he damages sales. Look at the hook-nosed creature there with the goggles and the green gown—who would believe that is Mrs. Ashman Watford, who writes those dainty essays, and who, realizing it, could ever help reading her between the lines ?"

" Or who," retorted Mrs. Wyndwood, " reading the essays, could help seeing the beautiful soul behind the goggles ?"

A tremor of sympathy traversed the painter's form.

" I stand unreproved, Nor. You can afford to be magnanimous. But I contend that beautiful souls have no right to get mixed up with hooked noses. We ought to judge a soul by the body it keeps. If this country ever becomes a republic, it will be due, not to democracy, but to photography. You will agree with me, I know, Mr. Strang."

He started, wondering what he was called upon to agree with.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," he quoted, vaguely.

"But you never put truly ugly persons into pictures," Miss Regan persisted.

"No," he admitted, "unless in portraits."

"And not even then," the girl retorted. "I'd far rather these portraits came out of their frames and walked about, than promenade among the originals as we are doing now."

"Why, I don't suppose there's one original present," Mrs. Wyndwood remonstrated.

"Isn't there?" queried Olive, in innocent accents. "I thought there were a lot, judging by the want of resemblance."

"You are not up to date," said Matthew Strang, smilingly. "Likeness is the last thing a portrait-painter goes for. Values, spots, passages, color schemes, all sorts of things take precedence of the likeness in their importance for art. The likeness is irrelevant to art. It concerns only the sitter—art concerns the world. A friend of mine, who edits an illustrated paper, which is the first to publish portraits of everybody who becomes anybody, contends that the number of persons who know any one man's features is a negligible quantity. 'All the public demands,' he says, 'is portraits.' So you see your criticism leaves our withers unwrung."

"Oh, do produce your catalogue, Nor," said Miss Regan, flying off at a tangent for want of an answer. "I am dying to see the name of that thing, stuck right up there on the ceiling." Mrs. Wyndwood, after protesting that nobody else was consulting a catalogue, which only made Olive more eager, fished out the booklet from some obscure pocket, and Olive turned the pages impatiently.

"It's just like Miss Regan to want to look at the skied pictures," her friend murmured to the painter.

"Oh, the poor man!" cried Miss Regan. "Listen, this is what the picture is called:

> "'Sweet Love—but oh! most dread desire of Love,
> Life-thwarted. Linked in gyves I saw them stand,
> Love shackled with Vain-Longing, hand to hand:
> And one was eyed as the blue vault above:
> But hope tempestuous like a fire-cloud hove

I' the other's gaze, even as in his whose wand
Vainly all night with spell-wrought power has spann'd
The unyielding caves of some deep treasure-trove.'

"Oh, the poor man! Fancy the indignity of having a long quotation skied!"

"What lovely lines!" exclaimed Mrs. Wyndwood, ignoring the humorous aspect which appealed to her companion. "Do they not express the idea perfectly, Mr. Strang?"

"I am afraid I did not quite catch their significance," he said, flushing. The confession was not so candid as it sounded, for he had been less intent on the quotation than on studying the sweetness of her face, and watching the emotional heaving of the jewelled butterfly on her beautiful bosom.

Olive Regan politely offered him the catalogue, and his flush grew deeper as he seemed to read his personal tragedy in the poet's images. What ironical Providence had sent him the words just then?

"Oh! most dread desire of Love,
Life-thwarted."

Perhaps it was that which made his life so unreal to him, which explained its hollowness. He had never loved.

In a strange flash of imaginative insight, it seemed to him that the room was full of lovers. Love was in the air; delicate rumors and whispers of divine delight, of holy pain, fluttered tremulously. On all sides couples moved, heart-bound, their beauty spiritualized, their very ugliness transfigured. Love redeemed the creation.

He remembered that in the days when he had trodden the lonely London pavements, hungry and heart-sick, jostled by hurrying crowds, he had yet seemed to himself the only solid figure amid a throng of shadows flitting to death and oblivion. In this tense instant he felt it was he that had always been the shadow; the one shadow amid a world of substantialities and solidities, a world that lived while he was recording the forms and colors of life.

And even if he should ever love—and the thought set his

heart fluttering as he had imagined it could never flutter again —even if Love should ever make existence real for him, was he not predestined to a doom more terrible even than the apathy of loveless life?

"Linked in gyves I saw them stand,
Love shackled with Vain-Longing, hand to hand."

Mrs. Wyndwood! She, too, was married. And in that thought he knew that Love had begun for him. The unrest into which the first vision of her had plunged him, and which time had stilled, had at last come to understand itself. He loved, and his love was vain. They had come to him, both at once—

"Love shackled with Vain-Longing, hand to hand."

He returned the catalogue mechanically to Miss Regan.

"They're Rossetti's—fine, are they not?" said Mrs. Wyndwood.

The question dragged him up from abysses of dream. But even though he felt he must be answering it, he lingered in luxurious agony over the music of the question, its vibrations prolonging themselves in his ear.

"They are indeed exquisite," he said, slowly, at last. "But do you think there would be any 'hope tempestuous'?"

"There is always hope," said Mrs. Wyndwood, gently.

There seemed a sweet assurance in the unconscious words: he heard a chime of golden bells floating up from some sea-buried city. Perhaps it was only from the band in the Sculpture Room. But he felt he must not attach himself further to the fascinating twain; his solicitude would be too marked, and he was aware of many eyes drawn by their beauty.

But before he could speak, Mrs. Wyndwood went on, musingly:

"And after all, hope is better than fulfilment. There are blue hills on the horizon which the child longs to go beyond; but happiness always lies on the hither side, with the blue hills still beckoning." Her eyes filled with dreamy light. "It is as George Herbert so beautifully says:

"'False glozing pleasures, casks of happiness,
Foolish night-fires, women's and children's wishes,
Chases in arras, gilded emptiness,
Shadows well-mounted, dreams in a career,
Embroider'd lies, nothing between two dishes,
These are the pleasures here.'"

How exquisitely she spoke the melancholy lines that seemed fraught with all the pathos of the human destiny, her words rippling through the buzz of platitudinarian trivialities he heard vaguely all around him, like a silver stream through an unlovely country. She had suffered too. She, too, had found life and its pleasures hollow; he saw that in the quiver of the beautiful lip, in the wistful brightness of the eye. Straightway his heart was full of tears for her. He longed to comfort her, to sacrifice himself for her. Why could she not be happy?

He had a sense of jar when Miss Regan said:

"That's rather a strange quotation for you, Nor."

"Indeed?"

"'Foolish night-fires, *women's* and children's wishes.' He had a true notion of our futility, that gentle old poet."

"I am in no fighting mood to-night, Olive," replied Mrs. Wyndwood, gently.

"You don't stand up for your sex?" the painter asked Miss Regan, in surprise. She had that resourceful, self-sufficient air which he associated with pioneers of female movements.

Olive shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Heaven forbid that I should be the *advocatus diaboli*."

The tossing of the crowd threw up a long-haired, long-bearded man with a handsome leonine cast of features, who greeted the two ladies with an air of *camaraderie*.

"Ah, *nous voilà encore*," he cried, joyously, adding in good English, though with a Russian accent, "Oh, Mrs. Wyndwood, you must see the little picture of the Christ-child by a young follower of our Nicolovitch. He is exiled three years already, and has established himself on your hospitable shores. Ah, how it makes a spiritual ray among your English platitudes! You will come too, Miss Regan?"

Olive, who had cast a droll glance towards the painter at the

Russian's awkward allusion to British banality, shook her head. "No, thank you. I hate children, and I am tired. You will find me here, Nor," and she let herself sink into a lounge.

Mrs. Wyndwood hesitated, as if about to introduce the two men, but the leonine Dolkovitch swept her off, and she had only time to leave a bewitching smile behind her.

"Won't you go and see the child, Mr. Strang?" Olive asked.

He hesitated in his turn. But she would come back if he waited.

"I would rather stay with you if I may," he replied, gallantly.

Olive looked sideways along the lounge.

"There is room," she reported.

"Thank you." He seated himself at her side, and stolidly regarded the crowd and the opposite pictures.

Olive fanned herself silently at great length. The painter, stealing a sudden glance at her, found her observing the human spectacle with an air of infinite sadness.

"Do you like dogs?" she asked, unexpectedly.

"Yes," he replied, startled, and with a vision of Sprat. "But I haven't kept one since I was a boy. But why?"

"I don't know. That woman there made me think of them—that creature they're crowding round. Don't you see that pasty-faced hag with the false hair and the real diamonds? That's Miss Craven St. Clair."

"Well, what has she to do with dogs?"

"Oh, she's a leading lady. Plays those erotic parts."

He looked at her a little surprised by the adjective, and still unenlightened.

"And what then?"

"Don't you know all leading ladies keep dogs—to get extra paragraphs? I hope you hate leading ladies. I do. They're so virtuous, and you know virtue is such a feeble vice. Nor has a dog, though she's not a leading lady. But rather a led lady. L—E—D, you know."

"Do you mean led by the dog?"

"Yes, whenever she's blind and the dog is sly," she said, mysteriously, adding quickly, "Nor's dog isn't all hers—it's mine on alternate days. He's such a snob, is Roy—he'll never

go out with her if she's frumpy. He insists on swell dresses, dear old Roy."

"*Can* she be frumpy?" he asked.

She flashed a quick look at him.

"No, she is very sweet and amusing," she answered, gravely. "She is the only woman I have ever been able to live with."

"Do you live with her?"

"Of course—I chaperon her."

Matthew smiled.

"What, don't you think I'm old enough to chaperon a young widow?"

His heart leaped.

"I didn't know she was a young widow."

"Yes, she's quite an old widow."

"Have you lived together long?"

"Æons; we disagree so much."

"In what way?"

"Our complexions go well with each other's."

"I should call that harmony, not disagreement."

"Perhaps—in your technical nomenclature. But I call it disagreement. Besides, we haven't a thought in common. I am a—well, how shall I define myself?" she looked up quizzingly, her fan to her lips. "I belong to that class of women whose sex is a misfit. And she is—"

"And she is"—he repeated, in some suspense.

"She is the sort of woman who won't renew the velvet edging on her walking-dresses."

"Now you puzzle me."

"It is evident you know nothing of women, or have only observed Englishwomen who mostly put up with braid. Velvet edging, which is an American notion, saves frayed skirts, and wears out quicker than the stuff. Look at her gown to-night—it trails; mine fits. She retains the infantile habit of long clothes; I am 'growd up' and in short frocks."

"I didn't notice her gown."

"Men never do. That's why we wear so little of them."

He was puzzled by a curious bitterness in her tone, as well as

by a perplexity as to her exact meaning. Her own frock was certainly prudishly high.

"I don't quite follow your definition, anyhow," he said.

"No? I'll try another. There are only two classes of women—those who ought to have been born men, and those who ought never to have been born at all. I am of the first, Nor's of the second."

He shook his head laughingly.

"Oh! but I won't believe that of either."

"If I expected to be believed I should have more hesitation in telling the truth," she replied, gravely. "We are both mistakes, but Nor is an incorrigible one. You heard her say she's dropped Socialism. She didn't tell you she's dropped a power of money, too, in subscriptions to the Cause. She probably thought equality would come about in three months, and that she was merely disgorging in advance."

"Is that why she looks so sad?"

"Dear me, no; money doesn't trouble her."

"What's the matter, then?"

"She's been married."

"You mean she grieves?"

"Quite the contrary. But marriage brands."

"You speak bitterly—yet you have no personal experience."

"No, I was never tempted."

Her frank brusquerie made him feel an old acquaintance.

"I cannot believe it," he said, with a smile.

"Oh, if you call a proposal a temptation! I call it a bare hook."

"You're a man-hater, I see."

"A woman-hater, if you will. Man I adore."

"I don't understand you," he confessed again.

"Really? I am a very simple person. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico.* Women I know and detest. Men I don't know and admire. If I married one, I should know him."

"But you might find him better than you expected."

"If I didn't expect to find him better than I expected, I shouldn't marry him; so I should still be disappointed. You see I know just enough about men to know that they are better

left unknown. I quite agree with Nor about the blue hills. It is better to keep one's illusions. At present I am happy in the thought that somewhere in the universe there exists a fine man. Even the average man is less petty than the average woman, so that the one fine man must be a Bayard indeed."

He laughed.

"Then, if *he* came along and made you an offer of marriage—"

"I should close with it at once."

"You are a droll girl," he could not help saying. "You are the first of your sex who has ever admitted to me that men are better than women."

"Didn't I tell you how sly we were? A man has one or two big sins, a woman a bundle of little ones."

"Ah, well," he said, smiling. "Two of a trade, as a friend of mine says."

"Now I don't understand you—or rather, your friend," she said, flushing a little.

"Oh, he's rather brutal. He takes the Darwinian view of things, you know. He says all women are in the same trade—man-hunting—so they run one another down."

"But I'm not running one another down. I'm running us down *en bloc*. And, besides, that isn't the Darwinian view at all. It's the males who always seek the females and develop the lively colors to attract them. Don't you remember Tennyson?—

"'In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast.'"

"Yes, but that's only in the lower creation," argued Matthew Strang.

"Do you make a distinction? But I am ready to agree with your friend—since he isn't here. We *are* man-hunters. What a pity, though, that civilization has so reversed the order of natural selection that the human female has to be picked instead of picking the male. See the result!"

"I see what you mean. Man has degenerated physically."

"And woman morally. We adore the beauties of your purse instead of your person."

"And so we develop brain to get purses with. Really, the effect is not so bad."

"Brains are cheap to-day; and they don't improve the appearance, anyhow. If people wore their brains outside—but who is this brutal friend of yours who gauges my sex so well? Do I know him?"

"I shouldn't think so. He's just back from strange places."

"So am I. What's his name?"

"Herbert—Herbert Strang."

"A brother?"

"A cousin."

"He's not an artist?"

He hesitated: "Yes—and no," he said.

"Ah, two of a trade," she said, slyly.

He smiled. "Oh, he's gone out of the business. He's become a critic."

"Wise man!"

He glanced furtively every now and then to see if Mrs. Wyndwood was returning. He was conducting the conversation with only the untroubled surface of his mind, interested enough in his piquant companion, but feeling her entirely as an interlude. Miss Regan perceived his perturbation at last.

"Oh, don't let me monopolize you, Mr. Strang. I am quite safe here till Nor returns. There are so many people thirsting for you."

"Oh, I'd rather stay with you," he averred, disingenuously.

"Don't be a mere man," she returned, raising her dark eyebrows. "Even your admirers think you more than that. It's not fair for me to keep you from them."

He was rather in a quandary. He could not tell her he was waiting for her friend.

To his relief, "Ah, I see them coming," she said. "You'll be off duty in a moment. I must introduce you to Dolkovitch. He's great fun. He will invite you to his spiritual Sunday afternoons. Do you judge people by their hat-racks?"

He stared at her.

"I mean when they've got company. Dolk's hat-rack when he's 'at home' is lovely; I'd go miles to see it. Such curious

curly, dusty, many-hued, amorphous things on the pegs — a cosmopolitan congress, only the chimney-pot unrepresented. Nor goes to meet the earnest people, but I go to see their hats. Oh, M. Dolkovitch, do let me introduce Mr. Strang. He is dying to know you."

"De-lighted," said Dolkovitch. "But I do not like this word 'dying,' Miss Regan."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I forgot," said Olive. "Mr. Strang is living to know you. M. Dolkovitch, like the ancient Greeks, Mr. Strang, doesn't like to think of death."

"I can't let you misrepresent him to a stranger, Olive," said Mrs. Wyndwood. "M. Dolkovitch is wide as the poles asunder from Pagan thought, Mr. Strang. His teaching simply is that, as there is no death, but merely upward evolution, the sooner the word is banished from our vocabulary the better."

Her voice raised the discussion to celestial heights.

"Never say die!" cried Miss Regan, enthusiastically. "Every dictionary should be without it."

"Just so," said M. Dolkovitch, gravely. "Our European customs, Mr. Strang, with regard to death are all in direct contradiction to our creed. The spirit rises into more blessed states, and instead of rejoicing in festive attire, we mourn for it, we put on black, and our looks are black, and our hearses are black, and the horses they are of black also."

"I think it's very proper," said Miss Regan, decisively. "I love black funerals. Colored funerals would make me feel sad." She rose. "We are going soon, Nor, aren't we? You look tired."

"Yes, we are going at once," Mrs. Wyndwood breathed.

The Russian gave the painter his card, and hoped he would come and hear more of the new gospel. Next Sunday afternoon spiritual people came from four to seven.

Mr. Strang made a movement to accompany the ladies, but Mrs. Wyndwood begged him not to trouble — M. Dolkovitch would see them to the carriage.

"Good-bye, then," she said with an enchanting smile. "It was so good of you to talk to us."

Words failed him in reply. Fortunately, a little white-haired

gentleman bowed to her at that moment and distracted her attention.

"That was General Dale, Olive," she said. "What a fine, soldierly walk!"

"Varied by ducking for bullets every moment," remarked Miss Regan. "He oughtn't to know so many people. Not that I admire the military bearing. It's so unnatural and stiff. One sees the drill behind. Even those little wooden soldiers I never liked. Good-bye, Mr. Strang."

"*Au revoir*, I hope," he said. Her, at least, he could answer.

He went to the "Sunday afternoon" at five o'clock, the earliest hour one could decently go to a reception commencing at four. In the meantime he had reread a great deal of Shelley, who seemed to have written a great deal about Eleanor, as she became to her lover's secret thought, though her full name he learned was the Honorable Mrs. Wyndwood, and she was the daughter-in-law of a Viscount, and connected by blood or marriage with several pages of Debrett. In the hopelessness of his love these ties were no separation; he did not think of anything but the blissful pain of seeing her again. He had ridden every morning in the Row, but neither of the friends had shown herself.

The reception was held in a flat half way up a bleak stone staircase in the West Central district. He was so agitated that he forgot to note the hat-rack, and his first glance at the company appalled him with the sense of a cosmopolitan chaos, without form and void, over which no light of Mrs. Wyndwood brooded. There were mystic oil-paintings on the walls of the narrow room, and on the gray marble mantel-piece stood a glass of water, in which floated vaguely the white of an egg.

The host introduced him to his wife—a tall, haggard, giraffe-necked woman—who gave him a cup of tea, and passed him on to a nervously peering Herr Grundau, who spoke to him of the revival of religion among the University *Burschen*, and passed him on to Mademoiselle Brinskaïa, a little yellow Polishwoman, with eyes like live coals, who had been speaking every European language in turn with equal fluency, as she knitted colored wools into some occult pattern.

"I have heard your name," she told him in English that sounded almost native, as he seated himself next to her in the cushioned window-seat.

"It is so good of you to say so," he murmured, automatically, not without the astonishment which from the first had pervaded him when strangers professed knowledge of him, and which had never quite worn off. He thought his peculiar name accounted for his notoriety.

"You're not a spiritual artist," she said, half interrogatively.

"An artist can only be artistic," he replied, in vague self-defence.

"That's all my eye and Betty Martin," said Mademoiselle, knitting indefatigably. Then she smiled. "You see I know your idioms."

A gradual silence fell among the jabbering, gesticulating crowd. All eyes were directed alternately towards the glass on the mantel-piece and Mademoiselle Brinskaïa.

"It is settled," Dolkovitch declared.

The Polish old maid rose solemnly, marched towards the fireplace, and inspected the glass curiously, noting the shape which the egg-white had taken.

"It is a *porte-cochère*," she announced. "That means riches."

There was a buzz of satisfaction and a little hand-clapping, the blinking octogenarian who had broken the egg being cheerfully complimented on his prospects.

The sibyl did not return to Matthew Strang's side, and the vacant niche was taken by a stout, elderly, motherly lady, who was introduced to him as the Countess de Villiers, and who, regardless of the fact that his eyes perpetually wandered towards the door, published her autobiography to him, from her babyhood in Brazil to her maturity in Gibraltar. There could be no close to her story, she volunteered, for she could never die.

This drew Matthew's attention even from the door.

"Do you mean metaphorically?" he said.

"No, literally. You could not kill me if you tried."

"What! Not with a knife?"

"Neither with fire nor sword."

"You know I wouldn't try," he said.

"If you are going to treat me facetiously I will not pursue the subject," she declared, the red blood mantling in her sallow cheek.

"I am quite serious," he said, deprecatingly.

"A woman who can live without eating cannot die," pursued the Countess, mollified. "I was an invalid, and in my convalescence gradually worked my way to the Truth, and by means of it I have lived fourteen weeks without food. I worked down from five ounces a day to nothing, dropping an ounce a day. And I didn't lose a pound of flesh."

"I have fasted, too," he said, grimly. "But I never found any Truth through it." He reflected bitterly on the anxious competition of people to give him food, now that he had plenty of his own. Was this the London which he had tramped for work, famished and rebellious?

"You must be patient," she answered, earnestly. "You must kill the man in you; then you will have got rid of the mortal part. You will be pure spirit, part of God. Existence is only God's thoughts; everything good is a God-idea, everything evil a man-idea. Jesus was the first discoverer of the Truth, and only the man-idea in Him was crucified, the mortal part. Only the evil part of us is mortal. I have suppressed the man-idea in myself, therefore I cannot die."

"But do you mean to say you will always live on?"

"Yes, though not necessarily on earth."

"But what will happen—will you disappear?"

She frowned. "Oh, I know you are making fun of me; but I assure you many eminent men have sat at my feet. Even Dolkovitch says I have a greater grip of the Truth—the glorious Truth of immortality—than any other woman in Europe, except Mademoiselle Brinskaïa and the clairvoyant Princess Stevanovna. There is nothing miraculous. I don't keep away from society, I dance and paint, but throughout all I am struggling against the bad-self."

"What sort of things do you paint?" he asked, feeling for firmer ground.

"My vision!" she said, in rapt tones. "My assurance that the universe is all living spirit."

And all of a sudden a conviction came to him that she was right, that there was no death, no room for death. Eleanor Wyndwood had arrived, and in the light of her face the noisy, motley throng took meaning and music. He rose eagerly, but she did not see him in his niche, and he sat down again awkwardly. The Countess talked on, but he had forgotten even to feign the listener. He could only see the gleam of a creamy dress in rifts of the crowd, which thickened momently. Presently he was aware of Miss Regan, who gave him an abrupt bow, and then crossing over to him said, in vexed accents:

"I am very angry with you. How are you, Countess? Young as ever, I see."

"What have I done?" inquired Matthew Strang.

"You've spoiled my hat-rack. There's a chimney-pot on it. Life has so few pleasures one can't afford to be robbed."

"Oh, please forgive me," he said, half seriously.

"I sha'n't—you're too respectable."

"Tell me something Bohemian, and I'll do it," he pleaded.

"Well, come to tea with me some five o'clock—with me and Nor, that is."

"Is that very Bohemian?"

"No, I'm afraid not," said Olive, glumly. Then, brightening up. "But that's only a beginning. And you haven't got time to come, either. That makes it a pleasure."

"I shall be delighted to find time," he said, looking his words. While they were discussing dates, the Countess rose and stalked away.

"She looks offended," he said.

"Poor old Countess!" said Olive, "she's breaking up fast."

"But she's going to live forever."

"I know. How sad! We came across her at Rome—the eternal lady in the eternal city. She's much grayer since then. Earthly immortality seems almost as horrible as heavenly. Fancy living for ever and ever and ever. No rest for the righteous! Oh, I do hope religion isn't true. How's your friend?"

"Which friend?"

"The brutal friend!"

"You're a queer girl," he said, laughing in spite of himself.

"That's tautology. All girls are queer. Did you ever know a woman absolutely sane?"

He winced a little—shadows of his mother and his wife flashed past. She answered herself, triumphantly.

"Of course not. We've all got bees in our bonnets. Men haven't even got bonnets. Except Highlanders. And they don't wear the breeches. I beg pardon, I should have said 'unmentionables' to a member of the chimney-potted classes. But that always seems silly. It's like spelling 'damn' in books with a 'd' and a blank. I have a lovely private swear. Would you like to hear it?"

He laughed assent.

"*Damakakaparatanasuta!* The pink lady, who always forgets her bodice, is looking shocked. She doesn't know it's Sanscrit, or something, and means: 'The foundation of the kingdom of righteousness.' Don't laugh, it really does. There is a cousin of the Guicowar of Baroda over there—you can ask him. Why, I have even got Nor to swear to swear it. It's like temperance champagne."

"Ah! I'd better go over to her," he said, snapping at the opportunity. "Or else she'll accuse me of cutting her again."

He pushed a whit rudely through the teacup-balancing throng. But to his horror he found Eleanor distributing farewells.

She smiled faintly at him, as her magnetic fingers touched his for a moment.

"What wicked things have you been saying to Mademoiselle Brinskaïa?"

He looked at her in astonishment. "I've hardly said a word to her."

She shook her head and passed towards the door. He spent some wretched days, wondering if he had offended her, and what the little yellow woman had been saying about him. He put the question as soon as he was seated at the tea-table in the dainty drawing-room of the tiny Mayfair house which the oddly assorted couple had taken for the season. Mrs. Wyndwood would not say, but Miss Regan cried out:

"Don't make such a mystery, Nor; you'll make the man think he's accused of murder, or drinking his tea out of a saucer. The Polish priestess says she doesn't like your auras —*voilà tout!*"

"What are auras?" he asked, relieved and puzzled.

"The Latin for airs, of course," laughed Olive. "It's her mystical way of saying you give yourself airs. Yes, you do. You're disapproving of our furniture now. But it's through Nor's objecting to furniture that suited my complexion and vice versa. We compromised by getting furniture in discord with both our complexions. The beautiful photos you see all about you are mine—I mean my collection. They are actresses. I adore beautiful women. After what you told me about the unimportance of the likeness I shall consider them works of art. I have always thought that actresses' photographs are intended as a protection against the curiosity of the public. But for them, actresses would be liable to be recognized and mobbed in the streets. Great Heavens! I've forgotten the scones." And with this unexpected exclamation, Olive rushed out of the room.

"She would insist on baking scones herself," Mrs. Wyndwood explained with an affectionate smile.

"She is deliciously odd," he replied, laughing.

"Do you find her so? I've got used to her. There's a monotony in the variety. Behind it all I see always this one fact —she's the noblest creature in the world."

He was touched by the enthusiastic tribute, so different from Olive's amused estimate of her friend.

"You must find it very pleasant to live with her," he said.

"Yes, especially after"— But she shuddered, and did not complete the sentence. He read in her face the tragedy of an unhappy marriage. His eyes grew moist with pity; he felt a mad, fighting passion against the inevitable past.

"Olive is so good," she said, brokenly, "she was of my husband's family—an Irish branch—but she quarrelled with them all—her father, her sisters—and came to live with me. Fortunately she is immensely rich in her own right, and independent of them all."

"Done to a turn!" cried Miss Regan, rushing in with the scones. "And I feared I was King Alfred!"

At tea they talked Art.

It was an exquisite sensation to have these charming ladies treat him as Sir Oracle. He was surprised to learn that in her girlhood Miss Regan had displayed considerable talent for sculpture, but had "washed her hands of the clay" on seeing the torso of Victory in the Louvre. He remonstrated with her, insisting that technical skill came slowly, with infinite labor. There were things he himself wanted to do—all sorts of new things that he had never yet done. One day he would try to do them—when he had time. Mrs. Wyndwood spoke contemptuously of technical skill in comparison with soul, but here Olive mischievously took up the cudgels for craftsmanship, and led the rather reluctant painter into an eloquent exposition of the joys of technical mastery; of doing what you would with your material. Mrs. Wyndwood at last caught the fire of his enthusiasm, and astonished him by expressing his sense of the joy of Art better than himself. Under the passion of her words he wondered that he could ever have wasted his time on portraits for mere money, or on scamped pictures for Exhibitions, when all these interesting problems were waiting to be wrought out. Ah, but Miss Regan was wrong, he felt, in thinking these problems the be-all and end-all of Art; it was soul that was the essence of Art; Art had no *raison d'être* except as the expression of soul, of the upward aspiration of the Spirit towards the Good and the Beautiful and the True, a trinity that was mysteriously one.

CHAPTER IV

FERMENT

The sands of the season were running out, but Matthew Strang sifted them for every grain of the gold of meetings with Eleanor Wyndwood. He was shy of formal visits to the house, he did not venture on the conventional course of asking her to

sit to him, for he would not consciously feed the flame of a passion that must be hopeless. But with that curious illogicality which distinguishes man from the brute, he called in accident to arrange their rendezvous, pursuing possibility with a perseverance that made it probability.

He could not follow Eleanor to all her fashionable fastnesses as easily as to the shrines of spirituality, for to be born well is still a necessity of life in some circles; but they met often enough amid the monotonous glitter which was the woman's birthright and second nature to the man. His eye perpetually sought her; in chattering drawing-rooms, in cool gardens, on congested staircases, in whirling ballrooms; finding every place dark and empty till she filled and illumined the scene. She gleamed upon him as unreal and insubstantial as the figures he had once noted in one of these ballrooms, completely girdled by electric lights, which, robbing the dancers of shadows, made them fairy-like and phantasmal. But he did not follow out the analogy or suspect it might be his own love which was surrounding her with this spiritualizing electric illumination. Each time he saw her he resolved never to see her again. He could never tell her what was in his heart, never insult her exquisite purity with the avowal of his love, even though that love were clarified to unimagined ethereality by her stainless radiance of soul. And each time the possibility of seeing her drew nigh again, he told himself that he needed her for his Art—that she was drawing him up from the slough of banality, that now for the first time his soul was really opening out to the appeal of the higher beauty. Not that he had as yet begun to express the higher beauty; he had simply abandoned the old. He was too restless to work, to concentrate himself; he flitted between the unfinished and the projected, painting in and painting out; he took long rides in the middle of the day, to the amazement of his faithful body-servant; he read emotional literature. Once an unconscious hostess gave him Eleanor's company at dinner. Mrs. Wyndwood was in stately black, with a bunch of violets at her bosom. It was an enchanted meal. They talked of poetry, and he seemed to be dining off poetry too. The wines were special brands of nectar, laid down by the gods in the golden age, the meats were

ambrosia, the sweets honey-dew. A beauty as of Hebe transfigured the faces of the neat-handed waiting-men. It seemed only natural that the beautiful stately creature at his side should overflow with quotations from religious poetry—was she not herself a religious poem? His recent feverish readings had branded lines on his own heart; he was able to answer her in lyric antiphony. His other neighbor he simply forgot, though she was a bishop's consort and a patroness of the arts, with printed views on the genuineness of Old Masters. There was an old picture of his own on the opposite wall, and the fear lest Eleanor should raise her eyes to it was all the serpent in his Paradise. His subconsciousness noted with pleasure, however, that the painting had mellowed—a proof that his theory of colors was right.

He watched with furtive fascination the play of Eleanor's beautiful Botticelli hands, plying her knife and fork, as she explained how under the influence of Dolkovitch she had drifted away from Socialism, whose professors always laid too much stress on the needs of the body. But she apologized for having spoken rudely of his "Triumph of Bacchus" from a mere knowledge of its title; he had made her understand now that the appeal of painting must always be sensuous, and that subject was only an excuse for draughtsmanship and coloring, and she startled him by saying she liked that picture of his on the opposite wall, which he had been hoping had escaped her eye. It became at once glorified to his own.

After the ladies had retired, the gentlemen talked about a newly invented torpedo, the finances of India, and the prospects of the Conservatives; the conversation sounded almost indecent, and he was glad Eleanor was not there to hear it. He took no part in the fatuous discussion, contenting himself with watching Eleanor's face amid the wreaths of his cigar-smoke; even in the flesh the face had for him something of this vaporous, elusive incorporeality.

In the drawing-room the inevitable Miss Regan claimed his attention. Eleanor was playing Mendelssohn, and he would have liked to listen, but Olive was less original.

"You have never honored our five-o'clocks again," she said, reproachfully.

He murmured that he was busy.

"That was the charm of your coming," she reminded him. "One had the sensation of beguiling you to play truant. But I suppose the tea was bad. Nor *would* make it."

"The tea was beautiful," he said, smiling. "But aren't we disturbing the music?"

"On the contrary. Nor is giving us 'Lieder ohne Wörte,' and we have to supply the words. I wonder what makes her play such old-fashioned school-girl things. Then it must have been the scones."

He shook his head and pursed his lips, and the music flowed on like a lovely moonlit stream. He was drifting on the stream with Eleanor, as, in those far-off days of young romance, he had dreamed of lovers drifting. A mystic silver haze was shed from the moon that sailed softly through the lambent starry sky, the whisper of the wind among the trees and the quiet lapping of the water made a dulcet stillness that was punctuated by the passionate "jug-jug" of the nightingale; mysterious palaces of night glided along the banks behind dim gardens wafting drowsy odors. The thought shook him that the world held such lovers—lovers who were not brought together for a moment and hurled apart in the accidental whirl of society atoms, lovers whose lips were not eternally sundered, but lovers who were each other's sunshine and moonlight and music, daily, nightly, perennially. He alone was doomed to eternal loneliness—nay, to that aggravated form of loneliness which is shared with a life-long partner.

"I came across your cynical friend the other day."

He started, becoming conscious that his eyes were full of sweet, hopeless tears.

"Indeed," he murmured automatically.

"Yes, the cousin you told me of."

"Did I tell you of him?"

"Don't you remember you told me he said all women are in the same trade? Well, he is veritably a cynic of cynics, for he candidly informed me, after I had been bantering and mystifying him with my foreknowledge of him, that he had simply quoted Schopenhauer."

"Where did you meet him?" he asked, a little interested.

"At the Dudley-Heatons's reception a fortnight ago. I call him the Minister of the Interior, he's such an epicure—the politician, I mean, not your cousin. There was Lord Fashborough there, the man who's just been appointed president of the Cruelty to Children Commission, and who glittered with stars and orders like a comic-opera Begum. He it was introduced your cousin—at my request, of course. Your cousin told me the Begum and he had travelled together in Spain, when the Begum's appetite for bull-fights and cock-fights was insatiable. I have never been in Spain, and two of my favorite illusions were destroyed at one fell blow. It seems that they simply push reluctant, decrepit old horses on to the horns of the bulls. And then the Spanish women! Your cousin describes them as ugly and unwashed."

He shuddered. Why would Miss Regan perversely obtrude the prose of life upon his consciousness? He would not answer her—he tried to drift again with the magic stream, but the spell was broken. He knew it was Eleanor's music that made the pictures, and that the odors came from the flowers at Olive's throat.

"He is painting Nor's portrait," she went on, indifferently.

He had to answer her now—in a stifled interrogative, masking a sudden sharp agony and foreboding.

"What, Herbert?"

"Yes; he asked her to give him some sittings. He hasn't altogether become a critic, you see."

"Who introduced him to her?"

"I did, of course."

"But his request was rather hasty, wasn't it?"

"Oh, it wasn't the first time. We met him again at the Russian Embassy."

"And how does Mrs. Wyndwood know he can paint?"

Olive laughed quietly. "Oh, he said so. He usually tells the truth, I fancy. But he *is* an artist, isn't he?"

"He was a Gold Medallist of the Royal Academy," he answered, with unaccustomed bitterness. A mad envy was consuming him. Why had he not asked Mrs. Wyndwood to sit to

him, seeing that her consent was so facile? Was he always to stand by while the best of life was seized and carried off by the bolder, the more reckless, nay, by the more unworthy? The remembrance that Herbert had the right, and he had not, did not dilute his bitterness, though it brought a hot flush to his cheek. Who was he to see profanation in the juxtaposition of Eleanor with a man like Herbert? However ignoble Herbert's conception of womanhood, had not he himself always found him lovable?

"Aren't you friends?" Olive asked, divining alienation in his tone.

He felt remorseful. "Oh, we are great friends," he answered, with cordial warmth. "He was very kind to me when I first came to London."

"He asked me to sit as well," Olive pursued, satisfied.

Matthew Strang felt the tension in his brain relax.

"And are you going to?"

"No. I hate flattery. So I sacrificed Nor instead. Of course I shall go and sit by her, though not with her. Curious, the subtleties of language."

"Then you will still chaperon her," he said, with a joyous smile.

"I never neglect a pleasant duty," she answered, placidly. "But we can only give him a few sittings."

"Ah!" he interrupted, with an involuntary exclamation of relief.

"We're leaving town."

He looked blank now. "Are you, indeed?"

"Of course. Why are you surprised? Didn't you think we were proper? Nor wanted the eternal Homburg or Switzerland, but I'm resolved to show her England. Like most travelled cockneys, she thinks England's the capital of London, and I want to teach her geography, so we're off to Devonshire."

"She will enjoy Devonshire scenery."

"Yes, especially the Creamery. That's what I've christened the little God-forsaken village I discovered. So you know, if you ever want a cup of tea, we shall have five-o'clocks going on there also. Patronize the Creamery."

"I will," he said, with an instant resolution to take tea both in Mayfair and in Devonshire.

"That's right. We'll send a coach-and-four to meet you. At least, you'll find it waiting at the station for passengers. Do you know whom I should like to meet most of all men living?"

"Wagner? The Pope? The Czar?"

"Don't be absurd. The Rev. Septimus Wheercastle. A local guide-book says, 'The Rev. Septimus Wheercastle speaks in very favorable terms of the Undercliff.' Isn't it delicious? Imagine a gentleman in a white tie patronizing an Undercliff! But, then, the clergy are always patronizing the Almighty, so why not His works?"

"Hush," he said, indicating the proximity of the Bishop.

"Isn't he beautiful?" she asked, in an awed whisper. "What a privilege never to be mistaken for a waiter! I am so proud of the bishops in my family. We have a pair, with gaiters to match, both High Church atheists; they are the joys of my life, they and the dowager duchess, who wears kiss-curls and raves for blood. 'Give me blood!' she cries, as she denounces modern society, stabbing her potato with her fork *à la* Sarah Siddons."

To Matthew Strang, who still had a vague reverence for duchesses, it was troubling to see them through the eyes of relatives for whom they were common clay. But this had always been his disappointment, the further he penetrated into the arcana of aristocracy and into the ranks of the distinguished—nobody ever seemed quite so imposing as his or her name in the paper. Taken in the mass, aristocracy of birth or brain was dazzling, overwhelming; but the individual was always amiably imperfect, with the exception, of course, of the one perfect being in the universe, Eleanor Wyndwood.

"You don't think much of your family, Miss Regan," he said, smiling.

"No, and they return the compliment. They don't realize how near Doomsday is for us aristocrats. We must disappear. We have played our part."

"What part?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose the upper classes, the people of leisure, existed to evolve culture. That can now be grafted on to the artisan, and both the upper and the lower classes can disappear. We want the amalgam now — culture without its vices, and work without its vulgarity."

"Shall we ever get what we want?"

She smiled with ineffable sadness and weariness. "I sometimes think that that makes life worth living. That and bishops. This is the only world in which bishops could happen. There is some consolation, too, in Royal Drawing-rooms and kangaroos. Do you think there is any other planet in which ladies walk backward or animals hop? I wonder. When one feels weary of the burden of existence, one thinks of the humor of Creation and stays on. It is a delicious world."

"Do you mean that you enjoy the imperfections of life?"

"I don't know what I mean. I hate to see ill-fed people, and I hate to see well-fed people. Unhappy people pain me and happy people irritate me. What *do* I mean? Oh, I think I see it at last. It is the unintelligent people that I hate to see unhappy, and the intelligent people that I hate to see happy. People who have brains and are happy can't have souls. The fools ought to have creature comforts because they are fools enough to value them before all else. How I envy my maid's capacity for envying me! Thank you, Mr. Strang, you have enabled me to understand myself."

The music stopped, but the player was at once monopolized by the bishop. Fragments of their conversation reached the ears of the couple.

"She's trying to convert him to Christianity," Olive observed, gravely; "didn't I tell you she was the most unpractical creature? She's always leading forlorn hopes."

"How is Herbert—my cousin—painting her?" he asked.

"Oh! he's only had one sitting. She's to be done *à l'ordinaire*, but she had her hair dressed specially—such a waste of time—and was manicured, and the man took as long manicuring her as if she had been Briareus."

"I mean, what will she wear?"

"Oh! a sentimental expression—the sort of look you see in

a girl's face when she's sitting on the stairs with her hand in a man's."

A shudder traversed her shoulders, crinkling the blue bodice that covered them. "For the rest, she will be clothed in one of those creamy low-necked gowns that become her so well."

Before the evening was over Olive was induced to sing. Matthew Strang was startled to find her choosing a love-song, and he was as astonished by the passionate intensity of her vocalization as by the beauty of her rich contralto voice.

"*Ninon, Ninon,*" she sang. "*Que fais-tu de la vie—toi qui n'as pas d'amour?*" And the notes melted exquisitely in pity. The tears returned to his eyes. It was his tragedy, it was Eleanor's tragedy, it was everybody's tragedy. "*Ninon, Ninon, que fais-tu de la vie?*"

Very few days went by before he rang Mrs. Wyndwood's bell. The mental image of Eleanor sitting to Herbert was the motor that drove him to call. He had only seen his volatile cousin once or twice since they had dined together at the Limners' —Herbert Strang's curious facility for taking up and dropping people had persisted unchanged. But the couple were destined to meet now, for victorias and hansoms hovered outside Mrs. Wyndwood's house, and Matthew Strang found that he had stumbled upon a formal "At Home," at which Herbert was fetching and carrying strawberry-ices to perspiring beauty. The popular painter noted with a novel thrill of alarm the boyish good looks of his friend, whose spruce, smiling figure was so visibly the cynosure of feminine eyes. Happily for his peace of mind, Eleanor was too busy welcoming her miscellaneous visitors to allot much attention to Herbert, who seemed, indeed, amply content with engaging the interest of half a dozen fair women, not counting an occasional interlude of Miss Regan. Matthew Strang slowly ploughed his way to the hostess, a cool-looking angel in white, through the block of bonneted ladies, amid which an occasional man stood out unpicturesque.

"You seem surprised to see me," he said, in low tones, into which he infused an intimate note.

"Yes, indeed," said Eleanor, with a little frank laugh. "How did you know it was my day?"

He smiled mysteriously, wondering the while if she could hear his heart beat above the feminine babble.

"You ought not to have come," pursued Eleanor, with a little pout that made her face adorable. "We pay you the compliment of not asking you to our tea-fights, and this is how you appreciate it."

"Forgive me," he said, intoxicatingly flattered. "I do appreciate it. I didn't know. I came for a cup of tea, with no idea of fighting for it."

"Then let me give it you. Do you take sugar?"

And she handed him the cup, which he took with a hand that trembled. Then a press of fresh people cut him off from her, and she made no effort to keep him by her side. Gloom invaded his breast again. He had to speak to some of the crowd, and he did his duty with ill grace. He feared it would be too presumptuous to outstay the intrusive crew, so he resolved to escape as soon as possible. But Herbert captured him with a hearty hand-shake, and introduced him—with a certain proprietary pride—to his bevy of dames, and he was perforce added to the applausive circle in the centre of which Herbert quizzed the rest of the company and the universe at large.

"Isn't that Lily O'Reilly talking with Mrs. Wyndwood?" he said, catching Olive's passing eye.

"Sure, and it is that," answered Olive, permitting the eye an unwonted roguish twinkle. "She is talking about her new novel."

"Wonderful woman," soliloquized Herbert for the benefit of his galaxy. "She is more read by the superfine critics than any other lady novelist in London."

"Oh, Mr. Strang," protested Lady William Dallox, a petite, elegant creature with an air of having stepped off a decorative panel, "why, the critics all slate her awfully."

"I know. But that's her revenge—to threaten her reviewers with libel actions, so that they have to read her to see if she deserved their slatings."

"You're a saucy cynic, sir," said Olive, laughingly.

"What is a cynic?" airily retorted Herbert. "An accurate observer of life."

"Beyond that definition cynicism cannot go," said Olive, ceasing to smile.

"What a pity!" said Herbert. "At any rate, it is true as far as it goes. To call Miss O'Reilly's hair chamelon-colored would be considered cynical. Yet it is but accurate observation. The inaccurate observer of life would call it auburn, not seeing that it is only auburn *pro tem.*, and that it goes through as many editions as her books. Similarly, to call her complexion hand-painted—"

"Would be rudeness," interrupted Olive, more severely, "especially as I heard her asking Mrs. Wyndwood to introduce to her the young man who looked so much like the hero of one of her novels."

"Ah, that puts another complexion on the matter," said Herbert, lightly. Under cover of the confusion of feminine compliment that greeted the quick sally, Matthew Strang slipped away, leaden-hearted, from the sight of the smiles and the sound of the laughter. Even had he been free, what chance would he have had, pitted against his brilliant cousin? He knew himself a silent man, scarcely speaking, unless abnormally moved, much less scintillating. He had only one talent—one poor talent for expressing the Beautiful to one sense—and this one talent he had prostituted. Everything grew black to his morbid mood. The dying afternoon, cool, sun-glinted, had no beauty for him; the speckless grooms outside the door irritated him; the shining carriages dashing along the great arteries of the West End, bearing their lolling occupants to dress and dinner, stirred him to something of the same revolt that he had felt when he had walked the metropolis of wealth and fashion in broken boots. After all, he had never really entered this circle of pleasure, it had always been a fairy-ring he could not step into. Beautiful as his boots were externally, there had always been a nail, a pebble inside; that adverse atom which, according to the philosopher, suffices to destroy happiness. His had always been a life of labor, of misery. He was still of the down-trodden classes, of those whom fate, if not man, grinds down, whose lives slip by in a vain yearning for the sun, who see happiness as a phantasm that is only solid for

others, and love as the mocking mirage of a beauty that is far away. He was angry—so unreasonably angry that the unreason seemed a reason for fresh anger with himself. And he was angry, not only with himself, but with Herbert, with the world, aye, with Eleanor Wyndwood and her idle, hare-brained visitors, reeking of the toilet-table, chattering of poems, pictures, and symphonies.

The thought of his mother came up from dim recesses of memory—still babbling in the asylum that was her haven of refuge after a life of storm and stress and sorrow and weary watchings for a vagrant mate—and he was jealous of Eleanor for her sake, jealous of her beauty, her breeding, her wealth, her fine dresses, her carriage, her fashionable visitors; jealous of all that made her different from his mother, of all that made her life fuller, freer, higher, richer—of all, in fine, that made him love her! Ah, God, how he loved her! He could scarcely keep back the hysteric sobs that swelled at his throat. But they had always been shut out from the sunshine, his mother and he. Happiness! oh, to clasp it, to hold it tight! Nothing counted except happiness—ambition, success, art, money, alike vain gauds, shadows. He walked past his turning, and far beyond. Lights began to twinkle in the great tired city; the summer evening brooded, fresh and cool, over the vast stretches of dusty stone. When at last he reached his studio the sun had set. He saw the pale rose-glow, mystically tender, at the end of the long suburban avenue of green trees and yellow street-lamps; it spoke to him of peace and rest and resignation, and some secret beauty behind all.

Not many days later his restless feet took him again to the Mayfair house. He would speak out — at some opportunity which the shrewd, kindly Olive would not fail to afford him— he would tell Eleanor all she meant to him, how she was becoming the pivot of his thought, how she and she alone might inspire his art to higher purpose. He would not ask for love, only for a noble friendship; he needed an understanding soul to sympathize with his inmost self, his aspirations, his agonies. He had always been hedged in by thick barriers of ice, through which no human soul had ever pierced. No one knew what

tinder for divine fires lay awaiting the spark within, nor how cold and lonely he felt in his glacial isolation.

But at first his visit threatened to be even more disappointing than the last. Another man was taking tea—or rather, eating nougat with Mrs. Wyndwood and Miss Regan — young and fascinating of feature, but with a fatal air of the minor poet. And a poet, indeed, he proved to be: a poet of considerable pretensions, who might win the bays if only he could get over his unfortunate appearance, which seemed to tie him down to sugared prettiness and elegant concetti. Matthew Strang had read one of his dainty, gilt-edged volumes, wherein dapper lyrics posed in the centre of broad-margined pages, and he wondered resentfully why Mrs. Wyndwood did not lecture him into spirituality instead of feeding him with nougat, which his poetry already resembled. But though Harold Lavender was accommodating enough to go soon, Matthew Strang profited little by his retirement from the field, for Eleanor seemed to be in a freakish mood, as if the contagion of Olive had infected her, or the nougat had made her terrestrial, and she played a lively second to her vivacious friend in recapitulating the charms of their dog, Roy, a slumbrous Scotch collie, that he had barely noted before, but which now became the climax of creation.

"We've only hired him," Mrs. Wyndwood explained. "Lady Arthur, to whom the house belongs, asked us to take charge of him, so he's in the inventory. His father was a pedigree dog, and won five hundred guineas."

"Yes, her ladyship had him catalogued completely, lest we should lose a bit of him," said Olive, rolling the animal over, and digging her fingers affectionately into his fur and pulling his ears and his paws and his tail to illustrate her recital of his perfections. "Brown-and-white coat—the brown of an autumn filbert, with a collar and shirt-front of white fur over skin as pink as rosebuds—look at it—black gums and palate, with the whitest of teeth, canines, I believe; a tail of russet and black and white that waves like a palm-tree. Observe the little black ring; we identified him once by it, though we had never noticed it before, had we, my beauty?"

Mrs. Wyndwood took up the ball. "He was lost, stolen, or

strayed, and information was lodged at a police-station that a collie with a black ring round his tail had been found. We told the superintendent ours had no such ring."

"The inaccurate observation of life, you see, Mr. Strang," broke in Olive, "which, according to your cousin, delivers one from cynicism."

"But cynicism has something to do with dogs, hasn't it?" observed Mrs. Wyndwood, smilingly.

"Yes," said Olive. "We must get Mr. Strang to define cynicism as the accurate observation of dogs. Don't forget to tell him, Nor, when you sit to him to-morrow."

Matthew Strang moved uncomfortably on his seat, raging inwardly, and scarcely knowing whether he was more jealous of Herbert or of Roy.

"Well, that superintendent must have been a cynic," Mrs. Wyndwood went on, "for he recommended us to go and look at the dog all the same. It was a wild expedition—nearly eleven o'clock at night—we routed out a nest of costers who lived over a stable, and were invaded by means of a ladder. I felt like a robber Viking, all heart-beat and adventure. It was glorious!"

"Yes; and Roy came bounding out and nearly toppled you over. And all the little costers came crowding out of bed in their night-dresses, and you gave Mrs. Coster a sovereign for them in mistake for a shilling."

Mrs. Wyndwood went into a fit of mirth over the recollection. For once her melodious laugh grated upon his ears. What in the world was there to laugh about? It seemed all the most puerile nonsense. He could have cried more easily.

"Remark his lively air," said Olive. "His intuitive sympathy is wonderful. He is sad when you weep, and merry when you frivol."

The painter merely heard the dog panting like an impatient steam-engine.

"He wants a run, I think," he observed, ungraciously.

"Aye, you should see him run!" cried Mrs. Wyndwood. "It makes one feel young again to see him scampering up hill and down dale. Even a mudhill delights him; it reminds him of his native moors, doesn't it, Roy, dear?"

Roy stared at her with large, unblinking eyes.

"But we are not dressed well enough to go out with him now," said Olive. "I told you what a snob he was, Mr. Strang. Shake paws with the gentleman, dear. He's smart enough even for your tastes. See how he likes you, Mr. Strang. If he didn't, the skin over his dear old nose would snarl up into gathers and puckers and frills. There! That's his favorite attitude—on his hind-legs, with his fore-paws placably on a beloved lap. Now he is happy. How simple life is for him! Lucky dog!"

"Ah, you forget that he, too, has his ideal, his unachieved aspiration," said Mrs. Wyndwood. "The disappointment of his life is that he can't catch birds. He snaps at everything that soars in air—even insects; it exasperates him to find things hovering mockingly overhead in defiance of gravity. He sits on his haunches and wails over the emptiness of life."

Matthew Strang gave Roy a kindlier pat. But the creature was still stretched on the tapis of conversation, and Olive proceeded to a whimsical account of the partition of Roy between Eleanor and herself, as joint house-keepers. Since they could not bisect the collie, he belonged to each on alternate days, so that if he were lost again, the onus would rest on the mistress for the day.

By this time the painter could hardly refrain from kicking the dog, and when Mrs. Wyndwood added that Roy was only eighteen months old, he rose to go.

Mrs. Wyndwood's expression changed.

"You're not running away yet?" she said.

"I must," he murmured, his ill-humor abating under the sweet seriousness of her face.

"Why, you haven't talked to us at all—we want to hear more about technique."

"Technique can't be talked," he said, still surly.

"We haven't any materials for practical demonstrations," said Olive, "not even a black-board."

"I should love to be an artist," cried Mrs. Wyndwood. "To feel beauty growing under one's hand—what a sense of creative divinity. I never sit to an artist without thinking what a privilege is his— Now what *are* you laughing at, Olive?"

"Nothing, except your subtle way of complimenting yourself on your good looks. Now, if Mr. Strang will be good, and waste a little more valuable time on two foolish women, I will pay him a compliment."

He sat down, his curiosity stimulated, and Olive, producing a box of Turkish cigarettes, asked if he objected to her smoking. Permission being obtained, she got him to apply a light to her cigarette, and then bade him smoke one himself. He was relieved to find Mrs. Wyndwood an abstainer.

"There," said Olive, puffing out a thin cloud, "that is the highest compliment I can pay a man—to expose myself in all my horror. I smoke neither for toothache nor neuralgia, but for sheer viciousness. See the result of our visit to Podnieff—Nor picked up ideals, and I, smoke. Perhaps they are the same thing in the long-run."

Matthew Strang dissented vehemently. "Ideals are the only realities."

"Nonsense, they are the only things that change," retorted Miss Regan. "The ideal woman of to-morrow will smoke shag and birdseye in long clay pipes."

Eleanor Wyndwood came to his assistance, and together they did battle with Olive, who took up the most perverse Philistine positions and fought as if for life, eluding, shuffling, dodging, equivocating, turning, twisting, doubling upon herself with the most daring defiance of consistency, and the most bizarre flashes of wit and argument. She would snatch a victory by specious logic that could only hold for a moment, and stand in as serenely mocking triumph upon a crumbling sand-heap as if she knew herself upon a rock, and was not about to bound off to the next sand-heap the instant the tide of reason swept this one hopelessly away. The painter found a celestial knitting of soul in thus fighting side by side with Eleanor; he did not blench even when she quoted a quatrain from Harold Lavender to enforce her point. But the shades of earth returned when she referred to Herbert Strang.

"Here is an example of a man who has absolutely nothing to gain from Art—who doesn't need it, who has means—to whose sceptical spirit the applause of the world is indifferent. And

yet the other morning—when the sunshine called one to the joys of the *dolce far niente*—he sat for hours toiling painfully at his Art, and fretting because he had allowed his right hand to lose its cunning. He had neglected the Ideal, but now his soul thirsts for it again, and the Ideal is avenged."

Matthew Strang felt a malicious satisfaction in the thought that Herbert was not getting on very well with the portrait. He had a sudden curiosity to see it.

"You are really too simple, Nor," said Olive, plaintively. "Can't you see the man's only trying to spread out the sittings so as to have you come there? I dare say he can paint as well as the present Mr. Strang."

Eleanor flushed, hotly. "Oh, there's no deception about his limitations. I am almost sorry I consented."

Matthew Strang's heart leaped exultant. "He did let his gifts rust," he said, magnanimously. "But I dare say his old talent will come back after a little practice. He had a fine color-sense in the old days."

His magnanimity seemed to please both ladies, especially Olive, and the discussion wound up suddenly in a congruity as unexpected as any of her arguments.

"You were great chums then, weren't you?" she asked.

"Yes; he was my cicerone in artistic society. I might almost say in civilized society. I owe him a good deal." He had no shame in hinting at his humble origin to these two unconventional gentlewomen.

"Where is his studio?" he asked.

They told him; but Miss Regan seemed to be suddenly uneasy. A little clock on the mantel-piece struck six silvery notes. He thought his hostesses might want to dress elaborately for some dinner-party or the theatre, so he tore himself away, and, jumping into a hansom, drove, on the impulse of the moment, to Herbert's studio.

Olive sighed wearily, and leaned her head upon her elbows, which were planted on the tea-table. Eleanor stooped and kissed her.

"Lie down, dear, till dinner. The heat has been too much for you. You look tired to death."

"Heigho! I wish I was really. What's the use of living, Nor, darling?"

"Oh, life is so beautiful!" exclaimed Eleanor, with shining eyes. "Think of Art, think of Nature! Cheer up, Olive. The horrid season will soon be over, and then hey for Devonshire!"

"And the Creamery," added the girl, in hollow accents. "But let's get away at once, dear."

"We must stay for a few things yet — we promised," Mrs. Wyndwood reminded her sweetly. "There's the dance at Lady Surbiton's, and the reception of—"

Olive interrupted her with a burst of laughter that sounded hysterical to her friend's anxious ears. "Oh, it's a mad, bad world! But there are Lady Surbiton's tea-gowns!"

"Do lie down, dear."

"Why aren't there convents for unbelievers, Nor? It's an oversight. I'd get me into a nunnery, but I should be suspected of piety. The hospitals are overrun. They are as impossible as Ramsgate; and your nurse is suspected of being a heroine. When will people understand that altruism is a passion, and that nobody wants to be patted on the back for gratifying instinct? When I did that month's hard in the Dublin Hospital — but that was before I knew you, dear — half my family thought me mad, and the other half a saint. But I was only incapable, Nor, dearest. I couldn't dress ugly wounds as if I wasn't feeling the pain of them. No, I'm a failure. There's nothing for it save suicide."

"Or marriage," said Mrs. Wyndwood, softly, laying her cheek to her friend's.

Olive moved her head away, shuddering violently. "I'd breed dogs rather." She rose to her feet and stretched her arms. "They are happy, aren't you, Roy?" She leaned down and pulled the collie's jaws apart. "Eating and sleeping, sleeping and eating. Why didn't Evolution stop with you, instead of going further and faring worse? But still there are those birds, Roy. And on our side there's Art and there's Nature, Eleanor Wyndwood says. Which Art is it going to be, by-the-way, Eleanor Wyndwood—Poetry or Painting? But it's two to one on Painting."

"You're feverish, darling," said Eleanor, troubled. "Don't talk at random."

"I'm talking straight, dear. Two Strangs to one Lavender. And what has become of Spirit, dearest? That used to come before Art and Nature!"

"And who said it doesn't still?" Eleanor answered, deprecatingly. Then, with a passionate cry that set her beautiful bosom heaving, "My God, Olive, why do you misjudge me? Can't you understand earnest seeking?" Tears came into her eyes and trickled down her face.

Olive kissed them away. "I'm a brute, Eleanor. The heat's too much for both of us. Good-night!"

"Going to lie down, dearest?"

"No; going to bed."

Matthew Strang had rung several times before he could gain admittance to his cousin's studio. Herbert appeared in his shirt-sleeves, grinning and yawning.

"Tit for tat," he said. "But I'm awfully glad you came, old man. I was just dreaming of you. By Jove, isn't it hot?"

When Herbert said "old man," in his caressing voice, Matthew became as clay in the hands of the potter. It seemed so good to have the friendship of this sunny being. He answered affectionately that it *was* hot.

"You haven't seen this den before?" said Herbert. "Not so swell as yours. But then I'm hard up."

Matthew smiled incredulously, for the studio was charming.

"You're doing a portrait of Mrs. Wyndwood, I hear."

"Who told you?"

"I was there this afternoon."

"Yes? Did you see her friend Miss Regan?"

"She is always there."

"I know. Isn't she a jolly little girl?"

"She's very odd," said Matthew.

"Odd? You Philistine! She's the most amusing girl in London. And so unaffected! You can say anything to her—talk about anything. No beastly prudishness. That's what I like in a woman. The other day she was complaining gravely

that a woman couldn't be a burglar because it would land her in compromising situations. Therefore there never could be thorough equality of the sexes, she maintained. Wasn't it quaint? She sits here smoking cigarettes while I paint that saintly friend of hers, and all the while rattles on in the most delightful fashion. What a flow of spirits! And, by Jove! the clever, biting things she says make your hair curl. I'm not in it with her, though I try hard. I draw her out to talk about her relations — it's better than Thackeray. She's no end of a swell, you know."

"I know."

"And disgustingly rich. In short, she'd be intolerable if she wasn't herself. What an enviable lot! All the B's—Beauty, Bullion, Blue Blood, and Brilliancy. No wonder she's light-hearted! They say she had an eccentric dad, which accounts for her—a man who wasted one of his fortunes on socialistic experiments! But she knows better than that. Eccentricity in the parent is epigram in the child."

"Which is an epigram," said Matthew, laughing, and considerably relieved by this outburst on his cousin's part. "But *your* parents were not eccentric."

"Indeed? Don't you see any eccentricity in the poor old governor's trying to make an artist out of me?"

"Where *is* that portrait?" asked Matthew, amused.

"Here it is, you duffer, staring you in the face on the easel all the time. Don't say you didn't recognize it. Please don't."

"Now that I know who it is," began Matthew, laughing.

"It *is* ghastly, old man, isn't it? But that girl distracts me with her talk."

"What made you attempt it?" asked Matthew, candidly.

"I wanted to hear her talk."

"Whom?"

"Miss Regan."

Matthew felt a great wave of affection for his cousin.

"But why don't you paint *her?*"

"She wouldn't sit. I had to ask her friend, knowing she'd accompany her. But I'm half sorry I undertook it now."

"You're certainly not doing her justice!"

There was still plenty of light. He took up the brush, and within a quarter of an hour Mrs. Wyndwood's sweetly spiritual face gleamed unmistakably upon the canvas. Herbert watched with admiration those sure, swift strokes, behind which lay so arduous a training, so irrepressible an instinct.

"You seem to have her face by heart," he said at last, with a suspicious twinkle. "But don't let me interrupt you." And lighting a cigarette, he threw himself on a lounge in an attitude that curiously recalled old times to the painter.

Matthew Strang painted on lovingly till he could no longer see his palette, then Herbert took him to his new club—the Epicurean—and gave him a delightful dinner for his pains, and over the kümmel and the coffee borrowed a hundred pounds from him so as not to sell out a stock that was depreciated for the moment.

CHAPTER V

A CELEBRITY AT HOME

Herbert Strang had gone down to Devonshire to finish his portrait of Mrs. Wyndwood, whose dress was still unrecognizable, and who was so agreeably surprised by the face that she graciously consented to continue the sittings at the "Creamery." Matthew had arranged to join him—on the excellent pretext of keeping his old friend company—but before he left town for his holiday, Conscience began working hard, ominously presageful of the complications that might spring up in the solitudes of hills and waters. The inner voice whispered strenuously to him to profit by Eleanor's absence to fight down his impossible passion, not intensify it unendurably by following in her train. Thoughts of his wife began to haunt him — thoughts which, while he was only an absentee husband, had been but pale shadows of remorse, dogging his few unoccupied moments, but which, now that another woman had at last enthroned herself in the vacant temple of his soul, assumed shapes more solid and

insistent. Home plucked at his heart, subtly transformed to something more than an unpleasant recollection. In a spasm of compunction and foreboding, he resolved to pay a visit to his wife to strengthen himself against temptation. The idea, once conceived, drove him to instant execution. Ere the train had drawn up at Camden Town he had determined to elude temptation altogether by accompanying his own family on its annual jaunt.

The visit began inauspiciously. When he had passed the ivy-clad turreted church, which was the one picturesque object on the road from the station, he was back in the old familiar mesh of gray streets, any one like any other, with rows of shabby semi-genteel stone-fronted houses, exactly alike, broken at corners by baker-shops and green-grocers. The August afternoon was depressed, with misty, sputtering rain. A few tradesmen's carts rattled forlornly down the drab avenues of apathetic houses. A diminutive barrel-organ wheezed a lively air. Never had his street seemed so hopeless. His ardor grew chill.

He paused before the door of the little studio where he had painted his first success—"Motherhood." The discolored wood—set in the blankness of a long brick wall—was scrawled over with chalk inscriptions and sketches by the urchins of the neighborhood. The house was round the corner, and, after a melancholy moment, he walked listlessly towards the front gate, swung it on its creaking hinges, and mounted the chipped stone steps, washed ashen-gray by the drippings of rain.

There was a new face, heavy and smudged, under the ill-adjusted cap of the maid-of-all-work who opened the door, and as he entered the narrow hall the sickly smell of boiled cabbage saluted his nostrils, and justified him to himself. But he was grimly embarrassed at having to explain himself to the girl.

"Is your mistress in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Will you wait in the drorin'-room, sir? What name, sir?"

He felt mortified and a whit ashamed. The servant's ignorance was an unconscious rebuke that counterbalanced the boiled cabbage.

"Oh, tell her Matthew," he said, flushing. "She'll know."

"Yes, sir." And the girl's cap, stuck on askew for the edification of unexpected company, disappeared down the kitchen stairs.

He would have liked to brush majestically past her, but delicacy prevented so abrupt an intrusion upon his wife in the recesses of domesticity. His coming was already sufficient surprise. A few hours ago he himself had not foreseen that a swamping wave of moral emotion would sweep him homeward. He walked about the room, morbidly fascinated by the flashy vases with the hand-painted shepherds, and wondering what Rosina would say if he made away with them, as decency demanded. To his bitter amusement he heard her voice from the passage remonstrating with Billy—in a very audible whisper—for the servant's indiscretion in admitting to the drawing-room a stranger who might do havoc among her cherished possessions.

"Goodness knows what he may not pocket," she grumbled, uneasily, as she approached the door.

"It's all right, Rosina," he called out, coming into the passage. "It's only me."

"Gracious!" ejaculated Mrs. Matthew Strang, angrily, putting her hand to her heart. "What a turn you gave me! So you're the Mr. Matthews! I really do wish you wouldn't come sneaking in and prying and ferreting and frightening a body out of her wits."

She stood there—no more pleasing than the vases—the features, that had once threatened to be pretty, sharpened shrewishly, though the figure had grown plumper except where the breasts had fallen. She did not look her youth. The face was weary, the pale blue eyes had lost their softness. She had hastily donned a cheap black cashmere dress trimmed with jet. The painter was glad the usual effusion of affection was wanting. Notwithstanding the pitch of reaction to which he was wrought up, all his being shrank from the desecrating embrace of the woman he did not love. Nevertheless he was conscious of an undercurrent of astonishment. Longer intervals than this last had parted them, yet she had never failed to exhibit amorous emotion, even though it took the shape of jealous reproach.

This afternoon there was a suggestion of resentment in her greeting—for the first time he felt unwelcome. He was puzzled, albeit relieved. But the secret of her mood did not leak out yet; and in the meantime there was Billy, sulkily awaiting his famous brother's recognition. The young man looked whiter and thinner than on Matthew's last visit to the house.

"How glad he'll be to come for a holiday with me," thought the painter, with a pang of joyful repentance. "He oughtn't to live in London at all. We'll all go down to some pretty little village where I can paint if necessary, and we'll stay till the winter." The cripple churlishly took the hand which his brother extended. His palm burned.

"All right, Billy?" questioned Matthew, cheerfully.

"It doesn't matter how I am," snapped the younger man. "It's months since you've been nigh us."

Rosina turned upon Billy. "Don't you take my part—I can speak for myself. You can't expect to see your brother in the summer when all the fashionable folks come up to London to be painted."

Billy murmured something inarticulate, and looked doggedly at Matthew, leaning on his crutch.

"I suppose I must ask you to walk in and take a chair, since you are such a stranger," said Mrs. Matthew Strang.

Her husband meekly retreated into the drawing-room, and sat down with his back to the vases that adorned the mantel-piece. But now a new horror caught his eye—nothing less than a framed oleograph of "Motherhood," which had found its way into the house in the days when its wide popularity still gave him a certain interest in it not far removed from pride. On his soul, tensely strung by Eleanor's hand for the high notes of imagination, this cheap domesticity now jarred abominably. The picture glared at him, it loomed suddenly symbolic. It was representative of Rosina and her influence. This was her height of poetry, the top measure of her soul—the mother carrying the little girl who carried the doll. The work he wanted to do—nay, the work he had always wanted to do—that was what Eleanor stood for—the rare, the fine, the ethereal. Years of insincere work had blunted and torpified him—Eleanor had recre-

ated his soul, had given him freshness of feeling, and something of the early ardor of aspiration.

This passed through his mind before Billy had stumped in and taken a chair opposite him. Rosina remained standing at the open door in an attitude expressive of household duties plucking at her skirts.

The painter shifted nervously on his chair. There was a dead silence. It permitted the tootling of a tin whistle to become audible, and gave the painter the happy thought of asking after the children.

"Clara's at school," replied Rosina, ungraciously. "She's the second girl in her class, and could be top if she wasn't so sulky."

"And Davie?"

"Can't you hear for yourself? He's only too quiet as a rule, but since you brought him that whistle he's been unbearable. It's the only thing that rouses him. It was stopped up for a fortnight, and he went about like a little ghost till Billy put it right. If he only had a notion of music! Billy tried to teach him to play on it, but he's got no head for anything. There! did you ever hear such a squeal?"

"Oh! he's such a baby yet," said her husband, deprecatingly.

Then the conversation languished again, and Davie's lugubrious whistle held the field.

Billy drew vague designs on the carpet with his crutch. Matthew fidgeted and at last got up. He was meditating how to turn the conversation into a tenderer channel, and broach the holiday in common. Rosina maintained her inconclusive attitude in the doorway.

"You've still got those vases," Matthew said. There being no other thought in the way, this thought escaped.

"Yes," she rejoined; "but I don't wonder at your asking; any day may see the end of them, servants are growing that careless. Even as it is, they only dust their outsides. If I didn't wash them myself with tea-leaves they'd be choked up in a month."

She walked to the mantel-piece, and ran her forefinger down

one of them. The finger grew black as with anger; her brow darkened.

"Why, Amy is worse than Jane!" she cried, harshly. "I won't stand any more of her nonsense. Do you know what she did last week?" Here she walked back to the door and shut it tightly, lest her words should reach the kitchen. "She washed the colored things in the same water as the whites. And then, after the wash, I missed a pair of Billy's red socks, and I hunted high and low for them, and made a fuss. The next day Billy found them mysteriously mixed up with his flannels. I am convinced she stole them, not knowing she had a sharp eye to deal with. I know they'll worry me into the grave, these servants. This morning I particularly said to her, 'Have you dusted the drawing-room?' and she said, bold as brass, 'Yes, mum.' And this is what she calls dusting." She held up her gloomy forefinger. Then, lowering her voice as if it might penetrate even through the closed door, she hissed menacingly at the brothers—"I'll give her a piece of my mind, that I will. If she don't know when she's got a good place, the great hulking brute, she shall pack herself off this very afternoon. A charwoman I give her every Monday to help her; two shillings I have to pay and her beer money, to say nothing of the work I do with my own hands. Often and often I make the beds myself, for there isn't a girl in creation you can trust to shake out the bedding, they leave it all lumpy. And what is the reward for all my kindness? I hate them all; I wish their necks were screwed."

"I wish they were," said Billy, impatiently. "I'm sick of hearing about them."

Rosina turned upon him again. "And who asks you to stay here? I'm sure I'm sick of hearing you grumbling and whining about the house."

Billy's eyes blazed. A red spot burned in each white cheek.

"Won't you give me a cup of tea, Rosina?" interposed Matthew, gently.

"I dare say Amy has let the fire go out," she snapped. "Ring the bell, you're nearest it."

Matthew rang the bell, and Amy appeared.

"Can you make some tea, Amy?" Rosina inquired, in sweet, seductive accents.

"Yes, mum."

"My husband has just come from abroad," she explained, deferentially and apologetically, "and we sha'n't be wanting any more at tea-time. We'll have tea a little earlier, and you can keep the water hot for Miss Clara."

"Yes, mum." Amy disappeared.

"Did you see the smudge on her cheek?" asked Rosina, despairingly. "She can't even dust her face."

While Rosina was speaking, her husband fretted under her conversation; the awkward silence that ensued when she ceased made him wish she would go on talking.

"How is business?" she asked, finding him dumb.

He suppressed a grimace. "Pretty fair. You know I've always got as much to do as I care for."

"You know what I've been thinking?" Rosina replied, in a softened and more confidential tone. "You ought to make enough to be able to retire one day. Why should you always live away from me?—it's as bad as marrying a drummer. At No. 49 there's one—a commercial traveller they call them in England—and his wife tells me—it's the house with the striped linen blinds—she doesn't see him half a dozen times a year, and you're getting almost as scarce, particularly this year." She dropped into a chair, finally dismissing her tentative attitude.

This seemed a favorable opening at last, so her husband plunged into it.

"You haven't been out of town yet?" he began.

Rosina bounded wrathfully from her chair.

"There! I knew that that was what you came to spy out. Isn't it enough that you've left your brother here to be a spy on all my comings and goings? It's rather me that ought to be setting a spy on you, God knows, what with your studios and your models and your fashionable, false-hearted women. Well, there he is to witness, anyhow. We have *had* our fortnight at the sea-side. Haven't we, Billy?"

Billy nodded.

"There! There's your own brother to witness. We went

last month, and all to save you money, though I know you think I'm making a stocking. They charged us so much last year for lodgings at Margate in August that I made up my mind I wouldn't be swindled any more, and so we went in July. And we did save—it's no use my denying it, with that spy of yours ever at my tail—but I've had to spend twice as much in London, with everything gone up in price. They're asking a shilling a peck for peas—you can go round and ask Delton, the green-grocer, if you don't believe me—it's enough to ruin anybody. And then there was the rise in coals in the spring on account of the strike—something frightful, and such a lot of slag. And then poor Clara has been so poorly; I sent for the doctor once, and then he would keep on coming to see her every day — there was no getting rid of him, and that brother of yours hadn't the spunk to tell him straight out not to come any more. Goodness knows what his bill has run up to. They're simply blood-squeezers, these doctors. So there! If you think you've caught me out, coming down on me like a detective in my sea-side week, you're nicely mistaken, Mr. Slyboots. What are you glaring at me for? Looking for the brown? I'd have given myself a coat of paint if I had known you were coming, though I don't pretend to be so clever at it as you, or your fine ladies either, for the matter of that."

As Rosina stood over him, breathlessly pouring forth her impassioned defence of the position she took up in financial matters, Matthew Strang felt he understood why men sometimes kill women. He had long since given up attempting to make her understand that her thoughts were not his thoughts, that, despite his hard training in the value of money, details of expenditure had ceased to occupy his consciousness the moment the pinch of need was become a thing of the past. He was inured to her financial apologetics, her tedious justifications of what he (in his ignorance that she was indeed hoarding money secretly, and, like all women, saving on her house-keeping) never called into question. He had steeled himself to a simulation of attention when she elaborately accounted for every farthing he had given her, and, habituated to money perpetually passing from his hands, he had never even reflected that her style of liv-

ing could not possibly exhaust the sums with which he supplemented her own income; to his heedless mind a growing family vaguely explained everything. But to-day the prosaic minutiæ, though painfully familiar, set up an inward fume that, intensified by her misconstruction of his visit and by her digs at Billy, approached insanity. He controlled himself with a great effort.

"It is you that are mistaken, Rosina," he rejoined, clinching his palms. "I came merely to propose that you should take your holiday now. I thought we might go somewhere together."

"Well, then, you're a bit too late," she replied, with no diminution of ill-temper. "And what's come over you that you want my company all of a sudden? I thought you couldn't spare me a week ever. I reckon the truth is that work's got slack."

"Nonsense, I told you my hands were full," he said, losing his self-control.

"That's no reason why you should waste money on me. I can't go twice to the sea-side."

"I didn't want you to go twice. I didn't know you had been."

"I explained to you why I went," she retorted, hotly. "They wanted three guineas last year for a sitting-room and two poky bedrooms, and there was no key to the chiffonier, and I'm sure the landlady nibbled at our provisions."

"But I would have gladly let you have a little extra if you wanted to go in August."

"I'd much rather you spent the money on the children. Clara wears out her shoes frightfully—the expense turns my hair gray."

"Then you wouldn't care to go with me?"

"No; it would be sinful extravagance to go twice. Give me the money if you're so anxious to get rid of it."

"Do be reasonable, Rosina. I dare say the children will enjoy another week of—"

"The children! Much you care about the children. You haven't asked to see Davie yet, and as for Clara—" Rosina's

scornful accents dried up suddenly. Her acute ear had caught the gentle clatter of the mounting tray. She opened the door for Amy. "You're sure the water was boiling?" she inquired, pleasantly.

"Yes, mum."

The mistress produced a little key from her bosom. "You will find a cake in the cupboard under the dining-room sideboard. And bring up the blue-bordered plates, the little ones, please."

"Yes, mum."

When the tea was duly served, Rosina resumed: "And as for Clara, I didn't even write to you she had been ailing. I knew you took so little interest in the poor child. She might die and be buried for all you'd know."

"I can't know if you don't tell me," he said, sulkily, stung by the germ of truth in her words. "Why don't you let Davie come up to me?—you ought to have sent him up as soon as you knew I was here."

Rosina threw open the door again with a jerk, and leaned over the kitchen stairs. "Davie," she bawled, "stop that dreadful noise, and come up at once, do you hear? Your father is dying to see you."

The painter bit his lips. An irrelevant memory rang in his brain with a Russian accent. "I do not like this word, dying." The face of Eleanor Wyndwood swam up on the cabbage-scented air. The patter of Davie's feet was heard, toddling up the stairs.

The child stumbled shyly into the room, the tin whistle clasped distrustfully to his breast—a pathetic, anæmic little figure with flaxen curls and big gray eyes that easily brimmed over with tears. He wore serge knickerbockers, and the rest of him aped the sailor, picturesquely enough. The child paused near the door, clutching his mother's skirt.

"This way, my little man," said Matthew, smiling encouragingly from the green sofa that sprawled across the centre of the room. "Come to your daddy."

"Go to the gentleman, dear," said Rosina, with withering sarcasm.

But the boy hung back, clutching her skirt and his whistle tighter.

"Don't be afraid, Davie. I won't take your whistle from you —don't you remember, I gave it you?" He held up a piece of Rosina's home-made cake. Thus adjured and enticed, Davie moved cautiously forward, waves of returning recollection agitating the wee wan face.

A lump swelled in the father's throat as he surveyed the weakling. The poor child suddenly appeared to him the scape-goat for an unholy union. Life had taught him from what fount of sacred love children should spring.

While he was hoisting the child on his knee, responsive to that strong appeal of feeble creatures, but with no specific stirrings of paternity, Davie wistfully held up his disengaged hand for the cake, which he grabbed as soon as it came within range of his little arm. His mouth was too preoccupied with cake to return his father's kiss, to which he submitted passively.

The painter laid his hand tenderly on the flaxen hair.

"Did you enjoy yourself at Margate, Davie?"

Rosina uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Well, I never! Who'll you be cross-examining next? Perhaps you think Billy and me are in a conspiracy; that I've gained over your spy. I'd better go down-stairs so as not to influence the child's evidence."

And turning on her heel, she marched haughtily kitchenwards.

Matthew sighed wearily.

"What's the matter with her, Billy?" he asked.

"Don't ask me. She's been as cross as two sticks ever since they've had new curtains at No. 53 opposite. And the weather has been so muggy. And your coming has upset her."

"But she seems to have turned against you, too. You used to get on so well together."

"She's so difficult to live with," replied Billy, fretfully. "So quarrelsome and discontented."

"What is she discontented about?" Matthew asked, uneasily. "She's got plenty of money."

"Oh, it isn't the money," replied Billy, morosely. "She's lucky, is Rosina. She has money of her own. Do you know,

her little American property has gone up a good deal lately. Her income is nearer nine hundred than eight hundred dollars."

"Indeed?" murmured his brother, dimly interested.

"Yes, old Coble wrote to her, telling her things were looking up, and he was right. No, it isn't Rosina that's got cause of complaint about money matters. She isn't like me—she isn't dependent on you for every farthing." His words rang bitterly, resentfully.

"But surely you don't mind taking money from me, Billy?" he said, with infinite gentleness.

"And why shouldn't I mind taking money from a stranger?"

"A stranger!"

"Yes, you're naught else. Do you think I don't know of your goings-on, your gaddings about to parties and banquets? Because Rosina don't read the papers, you mustn't think I'm ignorant, too. I've got a heap of things about you in my study, all cut out and pasted in books. I don't tell Rosina, because it would only make her discontented, but it riles me, I tell you straight, to be left here, leading this wretched, lonesome life. Why can't I live with you?"

"You could live with me to-morrow if you liked, Billy. But don't you see you'd be just as wretched and lonesome? All day I should be at work, and when I went out you couldn't accompany me. I can't foist my relatives on the people who invite me out. They only want *me*—and that only as a curiosity," he added, with a bitter perception of how extrinsic he really was to the charmed circles of Society; of how little affinity there was between him and the bulk of those who gushed over his Art.

"But if you would only help me to get my work published, they'd make a fuss over me, too. But you've never moved your little finger to help me."

"I got Wilson and Butler to read some of your MSS. I couldn't do any more. It isn't my fault if they don't think your work good enough."

"Nonsense! I don't believe they ever saw it. You only said they did to pacify me."

"Oh, Billy!" cried Matthew, in shocked reproach.

"Well, even if they did," said Billy, tetchily, "they're not

infallible. They're prejudiced. They think two brothers can't both be clever. I'm sure my stories are as good as anything that appears in their magazines, and a damned sight better. But there are any amount of other editors that you come across, for I've seen your name printed with theirs in the lists of guests at public dinners. But you go your own way, and never spare a thought for me, eating my heart out here. I come in handy to keep your wife company and to prevent her feeling deserted, and you think that's about all I'm good for." His white face was worked up to a flush of anger. He had the common delusion of the unsuccessful, that the successful in any department can pull the ropes in every other. Nor could he understand that Matthew disliked approaching people, and people disliked being approached.

"Whatever you're good for you'll be," said Matthew, soothingly. "If your work is really first-class—it will come to the front in the long-run." He shrank from adding that he did not think it even second-class; it was no use making the boy more miserable.

"Yes, but I can't run—I'm a cripple!" Billy burst forth, passionately. "Who knows whether I shall live to see the end of the long-run? Perhaps they'll give me a stone when I'm dead—but what's the good of *that* to me? You have everything that makes life worth living: you have love—you have a wife whenever you choose to come; you have money, and heaps of it, all earned by the sweat of your own brow; you have fame—your name is in all the papers; you have fashionable folk courting and caressing you. I dare say some fine-scented lady fixed that rose so beautifully in your button-hole; I can smell her white fingers. It's all roses and sunshine for you. But you take jolly good care to keep 'em to yourself."

The imbittered words carried no sting to the painter's breast. But he was sick at heart as he replied, gently:

"You don't really mean what you're saying, Billy. You know I've offered to defray the cost of publication of 'By Field and Flood' if you'd only let me."

"Yes, but that's making me more of a drag on you. Besides, you told me it's only the rotten houses that publish nov-

els at the author's expense, and that the critics look askance on them. But if I could earn enough on my short stories to pay for a book, I'd chance that." His voice took on a maundering, pitiful intonation. "I'm sure I've worked hard enough, toiling at my desk and denying myself every pleasure in life; you can't say I don't keep sober now. I never go beyond one glass of ale at meal-times."

"Yes, you're very good, Billy. You've been good for a long time."

"Good!" echoed Billy, in the same testy, lachrymose accents. "What's the good of being good? I wish I was dead. Why don't you let me drink my fits back again?" His breast heaved, he seemed on the point of sobs. The painter sat in mute misery.

A blood-curdling shriek from the whistle destroyed the intolerable situation. Davie, having finished munching his cake, had his mouth free again for musical operations.

"Put your fingers over the holes, Davie," said his father, "then it 'll play nicer."

"It's no use," put in Billy, moodily. "I tried to teach him."

"Look, I'll move my fingers, Davie, and you shall blow, and we'll play a pretty tune together. No, don't be alarmed. I'm not taking the whistle away, only putting my fingers on it. See, you shall hold the end fast in your mouth."

The child blew spasmodically. His father mechanically played the first tune that came into his fingers. A gleam of excited interest leaped into the child's eyes as he heard the notes varying mysteriously in a rough jingle. But the painter broke off suddenly. He realized that he was playing "Home, Sweet Home." It was too ghastly.

"More, more!" panted Davie, imperatively.

Matthew Strang obediently started "Yankee Doodle," and had to grant two encores before the juvenile tyrant was robbed of breath and desire.

"What's your name, my little man?" he asked, thoughtlessly, to make conversation.

"Davie."

"Davie what?"

"Davie Thrang."

"Ah! and how old are you?"

"I'se nearly four," replied Davie, adding in a burst of new confidence, "when I come to my fourf birfday, mummy says she'll gi' me a penny every week all to mythelf."

"Really?" said the painter, with a sad smile. "A whole penny?"

Davie shook his head in vehement affirmation: "Yeth, and I am thinkin' what I shall buy mummy wi' my firth penny—appleth or a flower."

A thrill shot down the painter's spine. The poor, sickly infant appeared suddenly lovable to him; for the first time, too, he realized the child as an independent entity, with thoughts of its own at work in the queer little brain. Whatever the quality of this little brain, Davie's heart was sound enough. And this heart was evidently entirely given to his mother. The momentary prick of irrational jealousy that the discovery caused the father was forgotten in softer feelings. His conception of the mother rose with his conception of the child. She was the other side of the relation, and there must be something beautiful in her to correspond with the beauty of her child's sentiment. The oleograph of "Motherhood" caught his eye again; he saw how insincerely he had painted it, from a mere intellectual idea, unfelt, unrealized; but he saw also the secret of its popularity, each observer contributing the emotion the painter had not felt. His eye dwelt upon it more tolerantly.

"Kiss me, Davie," he said, "and you shall have a penny now to buy mummy a flower."

Davie readily put up his lips to clinch the bargain, and his father gave him the coin. The boy regarded it wistfully.

"What do you say?" Billy put in, more amiably.

"Fank you," said Davie.

"Thank you, da—" prompted Billy.

"Daddy," wound up Davie, triumphantly. "There ain't no flower-womans now," he added, dubiously. "They was a lot at Margit."

"I'll be a flower-woman, Davie," said his father, cheerily. "Wouldn't you like to have this beautiful flower—this rose in my button-hole—for your penny, to give to mummy?"

"Yeth—I wants it," said Davie, clutching greedily for it.

"Gently, or all the lovely pink leaves will fall out. And you must give me your penny, you know."

Davie, with a perplexed air, vaguely conscious of commercial transactions too complicated for his intellect, hesitatingly retendered the penny, and, receiving the rose, was set down on the carpet. He ran eagerly to the door, blowing one disconsolate, irrelevant blast on the whistle, and then the brothers heard him tumble down the oilcloth-covered stairs with three thuds, followed by shrill ululations. They ran to the head of the stairs, but Rosina had already rushed forth to pick up her child, and her soothing prattle, varied by scolding for his careless hurry, made a duet with his howls.

"Where did you get that flower from? You've crumpled it all to pieces." She extracted it from the fingers that had closed upon it tenaciously when the fall commenced.

"From the gen'leman. Him what I calls daddy. It's for you, mummy."

"Tell him he can keep it!"

Davie's howls recommenced.

Matthew Strang's heart contracted. He went half-way down the stairs to where Rosina ministered to her bruised offspring.

"I didn't send you the flower, Rosina," he said, gently. "It's a gift from the child."

"Oh, is it? Then he's better-hearted than his father, that's all I can say. Thank you, my poor darling, thank you. Dry your little eyes, and mummy shall take you out to see all the pretty shops."

"Won't you come up-stairs and finish your tea, Rosina?" Matthew pleaded.

"I'm busy," she said, tartly. "I'm giving Clara her tea. She's just come home from school."

"Let her bring her tea up-stairs; then she can talk to me."

"I'll tell her you're here. I dare say she'll remember you—she generally gets something out of you."

He bit his lips to keep back angry speech, and remounted to the drawing-room. Clara came close upon his footsteps, and ran to offer her lips. She was a tall child of seven, with a low fore-

head, dark hair and eyebrows, a heavy jaw, and a high color—handsome after a rather Gallic fashion. The painter always trod gingerly with her, knowing she had her grandmother's temper. Rosina, lacking the clew, was less delicate with the girl, whose sullen phases irritated her immeasurably. This afternoon Clara was conciliated by sixpence, and chatted amicably with her father about her lessons. Presently her mother came up too, with Davie in her train, and there was the outward spectacle of a happy family group united at tea. The painter was emboldened to strengthen an idea that was gradually forming in his mind by expressing it.

"Billy feels very lonely down in this part of the town," he began, timidly.

"And what must I feel?" Rosina snapped.

"Then why can't we all live together, Rosina?" he said, more boldly.

"Are you beginning that again?" she asked, sharply. "You won't come and live here, will you?"

"You know it is impossible."

"And you know it is impossible for me to move to your neighborhood. I've told you a thousand times you can't afford one of those big houses—it would be ruinous; you'd have to keep a staff of servants to match, and things would be coming to the house at extravagant prices from aristocratic tradespeople, whereas here I go out and do my bit of marketing, and pick up a bargain here and a bargain there; I've found out a place in Holloway where I get the best meat a penny a pound cheaper than anywhere in Camden Town, and it only means a penny tram there and back. You don't know how much I save you a year when you suspect me of making a stocking for myself out of my sea-side allowance. And even if you can afford such a house, rather give me the money and let me put it by for the children."

He made a despairing gesture. "We could get a small house," he said. "I could work harder for a year or two. Perhaps I could get a few more rooms added to my studio. There's a piece of ground I use at the back for open-air studies."

"And what would be the use of my living with you?" inquired Rosina, brutally. "You don't want me any more. I dare say you could come home at night now if you wanted to."

"Hush!" said her husband, flushing. "Clara, my dear, take Davie out and buy him some candy. This penny is really his."

"Yes, father." And the joyous children disappeared.

"Poor orphans!" said Rosina. "Perhaps it's just as well there won't be any more of them."

Matthew Strang was startled, yet not quite surprised by the revelation of his wife's mood. She had never before so openly resented or dissented from the situation that had gradually grown up—one of those strange, complex, undefined situations of which life is so full, and which are only able to exist by virtue of not being put into words.

He stirred the dregs of his tea with his spoon, painfully embarrassed.

"I shall talk to an architect I know," he said at last, ignoring her allusion. "The cost mightn't be much, and it needn't be all paid off at once. Besides," he added, with forced playfulness, "that extra hundred dollars a year of yours must be used up somehow."

Rosina turned eyes of flame upon the unhappy Billy. "I knew it!" she said, cuttingly. "I knew you were here to spy upon me. So you have sneaked about that, have you?"

Matthew lost his temper at last.

"Don't be a fool, Rosina!" he said, roughly. "Do you think I care a pin whether you spend a wretched hundred dollars more or less?"

"No; I dare say you would rather have a wife that would bring you to the workhouse. They had the bailiffs in at No. 36A only yesterday. There's a wife there that would just suit you. The husband's something in your way of business, an author or a poet, and she's a tall, stuck-up creature who sits at the window in strange long gowns without stays, and reads books to him and never goes to church. My! You should see her out marketing—they swindle her at every turn; she doesn't know a horse from a ham sandwich. I don't wonder they've come to a bad end—you should see the dust on her

Venetian blinds. I prophesied the crash last winter—ask Billy if I didn't. They took in their coals by the hundred-weight. Don't you fancy I don't know that's the sort of woman you're hankering after. Ever since my Davie was born, and you got mixed up with those sort of creatures, you've been sorry you married me. Oh, it's no use denying it. You want a fine lady that would scorn to soil her fingers with housework, and expect you to cover 'em with diamonds, a creature that would faint at the sight of a black-beetle. But you were glad enough to marry me once upon a time, when you hadn't a dollar to your name. They say you're a fine painter, and who made you a fine painter? Who took you abroad, and supported you while you were studying? They think you're a fine gentleman, and who made you a fine gentleman? Oh yes, I know I'm not one of your fine ladies—but if I had been, where would you have been now? In the bankruptcy court—perhaps back again in the jail from which I dragged you."

Matthew crimsoned furiously. Billy leaped in his chair.

"You fish-wife! How dare you say such things to my brother?" he cried, choking with rage. "Matt in jail, indeed!"

"Let her talk," said Matthew, wearily. "I see it was a mistake to have come here at all."

Rosina cast a glance of venomous triumph at her drooping husband. The jail was a chance shot. In long, lonely, agonizing watches the resentful suspicion had germinated and grown.

"It's true," she said, defiantly. "Let him deny it."

"Why did you take a husband from jail?" retorted the painter, with a flash of fire.

"I didn't know it; I was tricked and bamboozled, and I had a heart in my breast then, not a stone. If I had been a fine lady I might have been more particular to examine your pedigree."

A sense of guilt damped the man's fire. The jail episode was not the only thing he had concealed.

"If you're sorry you married me we can separate," he murmured.

"Separate—aren't we separated enough? Do you mean you'd like a divorce? Oh no, not for this child. So that you may

marry one of your fine ladies. Perhaps make an honest woman of her?"

"Rosina!" He sprang to his feet, thundering. The image of Eleanor Wyndwood swept involuntarily before him, and he felt that this coarse-tongued woman had profaned it.

She flinched before the cry, but parodied it daringly.

"Matthew!"

He flung from the room. Billy prodded frantically after him.

"Don't go, Matt! Don't go! You'll never come back again."

The piteous appeal sounded like a prophecy. He paused in the hall, irresolute.

Rosina laughed hysterically. "You had better go with him, Billy, if you're so frightened. And good riddance to the pair of you. I've got my bread and butter, thank God. My children sha'n't starve, if their father *does* desert them."

"Let me go, Billy," he said, hoarsely, shaking off the cripple's clutch. "I can't breathe here. Come with me—write to me—do what you like." He opened the hall-door and closed it behind him, and dashed against his children coming back through the gate, with their mouths full of almond-rock. Clara caught at the skirts of his coat.

"Don't go away again, father," she mumbled, peevishly. "Mother cries for you in the night, and I can't get to sleep."

He swayed as if struck by a bullet. Then he took the little girl's sticky hand, and suffered himself to be led back through the area door. As Clara unlatched it he heard her mother sobbing hysterically above. The servant's foolish face peeped, white and scared, from the kitchen door, and made his own scarlet with shame.

"Your mistress is ill," he muttered, and ran hastily up-stairs.

Rosina detected his footstep, and the sobs changed back to frenzied laughter. Then she controlled both by sheer pride, all the steel in her springing back unsnapped from its bend, and she opposed a mocking smile to his discomfited concern. The strength that had kept her silent for years was now summoned to undo the effects of speech.

"What have you forgotten?" she asked, tauntingly. "Have you come back for your good-bye kiss or your umbrella or

what? Kisses, they're off; we're an old married couple now, but I don't want to stick to your umbrella. It might be a present from somebody nice. *Is* there an umbrella about, Billy? No? Dear me! Then it must be that rose. Ah, but Davie gave me that." She called down the stairs. "Wasn't it you that gave me the rose, Davie? Yes, and I'm not going to give it back. Don't be afraid, dear. Mummy won't give away her darling's present. Did 'um bruise himself to give it to me? Poor Davie!"

There was a hectic flush on her cheek; her voice rang false. Matthew was afraid.

"Well, good-bye," she jerked, after a pause. "What are you waiting for?"

"Don't go away," whispered Billy, nervously, shattered by the scenes of the afternoon. "Come to the study; she'll cool down soon."

The suggestion commended itself to Matthew. It seemed cowardly to leave this hysteric couple to themselves. He descended the kitchen stairs once more, and passed along the corridor that led to his old studio, now turned into a workroom for Billy, and fitted up with bookshelves, whose contents hid the whitewashed walls. A writing-table, littered with papers, occupied the centre of the floor, and piles of manuscript showed within a little angle cupboard, whose door swung open. There were several reproductions of his brother's works roughly stuck on the wall—one a valuable engraving signed by the artist; and the "Triumph of Bacchus" was already represented in two shapes—once by the half-page cut out of "The Season's Pictures," and again by a full-page photograph of it from the *Graphic*.

"It's a shame they don't make you an A.R.A., Matt," said Billy. "Your pictures get more advertisement for the Academy than almost anybody else's."

"For God's sake, don't talk of that now," said the painter, brokenly. His eye noted curiously that ancient engraving of "The Angelus," miraculously preserved to be one of Billy's treasures, by the world's refusal to give more than eighteenpence for it.

It was a poor representative of the original, but the other ornaments of the study seemed to him tawdry in comparison. His taste had changed: the picture attracted him now. Without analyzing—the turmoil of his mind did not permit that—he had an impression of sincerity, of sympathetic vision, of work done inevitably; not, like his own work, from cleverness. Despair of his life and his Art mingled in one dark paroxysm as he dropped upon a chair and laid his head upon the writing-table.

"Don't, you may get your hair sticky," said Billy. "I don't think it's quite dry—I was just pasting it in before you came."

He withdrew the album from under his brother's head—the pious compilation with which he fed at once his jealousy and his pride. "I suppose you saw that little sketch of your life in 'Our Celebrities' this month?"

Matthew did not answer.

"It's not quite accurate, you know," went on Billy. "It says you're a bachelor, and that you were born in Canada, and so on. But that doesn't matter. There are always mistakes, and, of course, nobody knows about Rosina. Listen! 'The eldest child of a prosperous Canadian farmer, he gave early evidence of talent, and was sent to England to study art, and soon became the favorite pupil at Grainger's well-known Art School in central London, where he studied under Tarmigan, a frigid artist who at one time enjoyed considerable repute. Later, Mr. Strang pursued his studies in Paris and Rome, and, returning to London with ripened art, sought and obtained the suffrages of the Academicians with his picture entitled "Motherhood," since so familiar to the public in countless reproductions, and the herald of a career of uniform success. Next year his classic picture—'"

"My God! Do you want to drive me mad?" roared the sick lion, raising his head. "I know all about it."

"You needn't bully my head off," said Billy, pettishly. "I asked you if you'd seen it."

"It's copied from *People of the Time*," groaned the painter. He clinched his fists in a blind rage against the universe. This was what the public read and believed about his life—his life,

with its slow, sick struggles, its inner and outer discords, its poignant pathos. And this was what he read and believed about other men. Good God! What was behind their lives, the lives of his fellows, whose smooth histories he read in biographical summaries? The possibilities of the human tragedy frightened him. Then the realities of the human farce seized him, and he terrified Billy by a long peal of sardonic laughter.

The laughter ceased suddenly. "Go and see how she is," he commanded the shuddering Billy, and the poor cripple, now less frightened of Rosina than of his brother, sped away as fast as his crutch could carry him.

Left alone, the painter looked abstractedly at "The Angelus," and it drifted his thoughts back to the time when he had tried to sell it for bread. How happy were those times of youthful aspiration, when all things were new and all things were true, and hunger itself was but a sauce to eke out the scanty meal! What was starvation to this terrible hunger for happiness, what the want of money to this want of something to live for? Ah, money was nothing; money troubles were mental figments. It was the cark of life that killed—money or no money. Oh, to be young and free again; free to be a slave to Art! How hollow it all was—this fame, this running about, this Society that welcomed him, as he had truly told Billy, like a kind of monstrosity! He had been happier when he had toiled in this little white-washed studio, even after his mistaken marriage. The lines of the poet in whom he had read most of late fell from his lips like an original personal cry:

> "Oh, I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away this sordid life of care."

And thus Billy found him, his head on the desk, his shoulders heaving convulsively.

"Matt!" he cried, timidly.

"Well!" in muffled accents.

"She's gone to her room and locked herself in. She says you're not to come near her any more ever."

A long silence.

"But I dare say it 'll blow over, Matt. This is not the first

time she's been taken like that, though you've not been here to bear it."

A longer silence.

Billy cudgelled his brain to rouse his brother.

"I saw Ruth Hailey a month ago," he said at last. This time he succeeded in evoking an indifferent monosyllable.

"Yes?"

"Yes. She called here to see us—she was in London. She had got our address from Abner Preep before leaving America. I gave her the address of your studio, but she said she was uncertain whether she would have time to look you up. She seems to be secretary to Mrs. Verder, the Woman's Rights woman, goes about with her everywhere. Linda Verder's lectures—you remember them at the St. James's Hall in July. She's in Scotland now, and later on, Ruth writes to me (for I asked her to correspond with me a little) they're going to Paris for a course, under the patronage of the American Embassy. They'll stay in Paris some time, as Linda Verder wants a rest badly, and has a lot of American friends there. Then they go to Australia and New Zealand. Curious, isn't it?"

"How did she look?"

"Ruth? Oh, she's gone off a good deal, to my thinking. She must be getting pretty old now—about as old as you, which is young for a man, but old for a woman. But her eyes are fine, and there's a sweetness—I can't describe it. She says she used to teach Sunday-school in the States, and, though she enjoys travelling about, regrets having had to give up her class. Fancy! She used to be such a smart girl, too, and I should have thought the deacon had disgusted her with religion. You know she won't have anything to do with him."

"Is he still alive?"

"Oh, he's just as spry as ever. His father's curled up his toes, though. Old Hey had the old man from Digby to live with him, and they used to go at it hammer and tongs."

Billy could extract no further answer. But he would not let his brother go that night, insisting he must sleep with him as usual in the spare bed in his bedroom.

About nine o'clock Rosina sent a specially nice supper for

two down to the study. Matthew roused himself to eat a morsel to keep Billy company, and then, before going to his sleepless couch in Billy's room, bethought himself of whiling away the time by answering some letters which had been bulking his inner coat-pocket for days. One of these was a reverential request for an autograph, addressed from a fine-sounding country house, and backed by the compulsive seduction of a stamped envelope.

His emotions were exhausted. He wrote apathetically, "Yours truly, Matthew Strang," writing very near the top of the note-paper for fear of fraud, and cutting off the Camden Town heading.

The celebrity was at home for once.

CHAPTER VI

A DEVONSHIRE IDYL

The old-fashioned yellow coach, top-heavy with pyramidal luggage, rattled along the Devonshire coast, striking its apex against over-arching boughs, and Matthew Strang sat on the box-seat, forgetting London in the prospect of Eleanor Wyndwood and in the view of white and red houses scattered like wild-flowers about a steep green hill overhanging the curve of a lovely bay.

For Rosina had continued obdurate and invisible; she had sent up breakfast from the kitchen without appearing, and with an irritating air of cooking for a gentleman-boarder, and he, fretful and anguished after a wretched wakeful night, had fled, snarling even at Billy, who would have stayed him further. The remembrance of her cantankerousness and of his own ill-humor had accompanied him all the way to Devonshire, but the sight of the sea—rolling vast and green and sun-dimpled—the wrinkled unaging sea, had calmed him. His burdens fell from him. The last vapors of London, the torpid miasma of the packed streets, the cabbage odors of Camden Town, were blown afar; he drew deep breaths of the delicious air.

How lucky it was Rosina had shied at the suggestion which he had thrown out on the reckless impulse of a desperate moment! How could they possibly live together any more? To draw the same atmosphere with her was stifling; and at the thought his deep inspirations took on a new voluptuousness of freedom regained. Decidedly he had not counted the cost when the quixotic proposal sprang to his lips. For that atmosphere meant death to his soul — nothing less; death to all his new stirrings and yearnings—asphyxiation to his Art. Ah! the good salt air, let it blow on his free forehead, let it play among his early-graying locks. Let it whisper the brave dreams of youth till the nimble blood tingles and the eyes are wet with tears. Let him feel the freshness of morning, though the sun is hastening westward, and the best of the day is spent. The coachman blows his horn, and the hills are filled with the echoes of romance. Away with the clogging mists and the moral fogs of the town, away with the moody vision of a narrow-souled virago in a gray house in a drab labyrinth, and ho! for the enchanted cliffs and waters, where loveliness broods like light over earth and sea, and a spirit that is half a woman and half the soul of all beauty waits with swelling bosom and kindling eyes. Oh, the bonny horses, the spanking quartette, how they sweep round the curves and dash down the dales, and how gallantly the ruddy-faced driver holds them in the hollow of his hand! What delightful villages, primitive as the rough stone of which they are built, what quaint old hostels and archaic streets steeped in the mingled scent of the sea and the moors! Here be old-world orchards, here be cosey cottages and sweet homely gardens, gay with nasturtiums and hollyhocks and scarlet-runners, with roses and pansies.

Ta-ra! Ta-ra-ra-ra! Ta-ra! The driver airily salutes the afternoon. Over the ferny walls of the Devonshire lanes, the outside passengers behold the red crags perching picturesquely on the sea-front like petrified monsters of an earlier era, and the trail of redder gold quivering across the great water; the wind rises and flecks the shimmering green as with a flock of skimming sea-birds. Oh, the beauty of the good round earth, the beauty forgotten and blotted out in the reeking back streets of

great cities! Oh, gracious privilege of the artist, to seize a moment of the flowing loveliness of all things; to pass it through the alembic of his soul, and give it back transfigured and immortal.

"To feel Beauty growing under one's hand." The words were Eleanor's—they chimed celestially in his ears, not as words, but as *her* words, stored up as in a phonograph with every dainty intonation, but with their music sweetened rather than deadened. All she had ever said to him he could recall as from a box of heavenly airs. Every syllable had the golden cadence of poesie. To love her was to be young again, fit for every high emprise, sensitive to every tremor of fantasy and romance.

"Stiff collar-work that, sir."

The driver's tongue was clattering tirelessly—of his horses, which, more sensible than men, wouldn't touch a drop more than was good for them; of his life on the box from boyhood, his easy-going content, his pioneer daughter, the first in those parts to wear spectacles; his pleasure in seeing gentlefolk come down to circulate the money, his scorn of chapel-goers; but Matthew Strang's private phonograph was performing with equal indefatigability, and his spirit leaped incessantly from one to the other, touched to a large geniality for horn-blowing humanity.

The sun was sinking royally in the sea, like a Viking in his burning vessel, when the coach obligingly drew up with a flourish of the horn and a scattering of chickens and a barking of dogs at the farm where Herbert had his headquarters. He was disappointed not to find Herbert there to receive him, as he had telegraphed his advent; but just as he was comfortably installed and was beginning to wonder whether he should start dining alone, that ever-young gentleman galloped up, flushed with health and sun and exercise, and, leaping from his horse, gave Matthew such hearty greeting that the painter had a grateful sense of being welcomed to an ancient seignorial home by a bluff and hospitable squire.

"I've been working at the portrait," Herbert explained, ascending to his room with his hand affectionately on the shoulder

of Matthew, who was thus forced to remount the stairs. "Of course I keep my painting kit at their place. And a jolly old place it is, with the sea cleaning the doorsteps, or pretty nearly. They're beastly comfortable, with their London servants and carriages, and they've a motherly old person who seems a combination of cook and chaperon, and turns out delicious dishes, and they've taken on a native girl to help them—a sweet simple creature with cheeks like strawberries and cream. Do you remember the lady who said strawberries and cream needed only to be forbidden to be an ecstasy? These *are* forbidden. Oh, don't look glum, I haven't indulged. Forbidden fruit is out of season. I'm tired of it. It's generally canned. And I have had too much of the foreign brands—ugh! I can see the litter of broken tins. I'm developing a healthy taste for the fresh-growing article, without any prohibitive tariff."

Matthew turned to grasp his friend's hand silently, as though sealing some compact. He felt it was Eleanor whose magnetism had uplifted Herbert to that reverence for womanhood he himself had always entertained. It was impossible to live under her spell and remain coarse. And, paradoxically enough, he was glad Herbert was living on a higher plane—it strengthened him in his own purely spiritual devotion to the beautiful friend of his soul. How stupid to have hesitated; how commonplace and ignoble to have gone to see Rosina for fear of Eleanor's influence upon him. Like the old Roman, he had lost a day. And he had uselessly harrowed his soul to boot.

And yet, perhaps, not altogether uselessly, he reflected consolingly. The visit had laid the ghost of remorse; the full daylight had been turned upon the situation; he had seen beyond reach of further doubt that he was not to blame for it; that he was the victim of the blind tragedy of circumstance. True, the full daylight had also revealed that Rosina was taking the situation far more tragically than he had ever allowed himself to suspect; it was pitiful, but it could not be helped. His own mother had fared far worse, her living death had taught him resentful resignation to the workings of fate. No, Rosina must be put on one side. He had lost happiness; his Art at least must be saved.

Waiting for Herbert to change his clothes, he looked out of the ivy-wreathed, diamond-paned casement, and saw a lonely white wraith of a moon glimmering in the great spaces over the great lonely deep, and heard the moan of the waves under the wind's lash, and watched the sunset dying in pale greens and pinks and saffrons; and so, in an exalted mood, went down to dinner.

It was getting towards nine o'clock when the cousins lit their cigars and strolled along the cliffs, their feet taking them westwards, where phosphorescent streaks of light green lingered in the sky, sending out thinner lucent shoots to join the eastern gray.

"I'll show you the house—it's not more than a mile," Herbert volunteered.

"We can't call to-night," said Matthew.

"What! Not with a madcap like Olive? You don't mind my calling her Olive, do you, old man?"

"No," laughed Matthew.

"Well, then! If I may call her Olive, why mayn't I call on her in the evening? But that's an argument rather in Olive's vein, though it appears to puzzle you—ha! ha! ha! But you mustn't bring your London etiquette down here with you, my boy," he went on in a harangue tempered by puffs—"you'd better send it back by the carrier to-morrow if you packed it in your luggage by mistake. We're in another world, and in an earlier century. What a superficial view to think contemporaries live in the same century! These people—as yet unsophisticated by the tourist—are living in the seventeenth century A.D. at the latest; they'd burn Olive for a witch if they knew her as I do, the droll elf, with her masculine brain and her tricksy femininity. I think I've lived in every place and time under the sun. I've been with fourteenth-century brigands and sixth-century monks. And in Jerusalem with the Jews I was back in the B.C. ages. I really think all the centuries live side by side. There must have been A.D. people in the B.C. times, just as there are B.C. people living in A.D. times. Fancy thinking these bucolics an evolutionary advance on Pericles and Horace. Evolution must move like those waves down below,

sending scouts out here and there far in advance of the general march of the waters, whenever there's a hollow curve in the coast. I'm a twenty-fifth century man myself, which makes the nineteenth call me godless and immoral. But what were we talking about?"

"Goodness knows. Oh, I know—"

"I'm aware you are goodness incarnate," interpolated Herbert.

"I was saying we couldn't call on Mrs. Wyndwood to-night."

"Ah, but why shouldn't Mrs. Wyndwood want a stroll after dinner as much as we? I told her of your wire. What more natural than that they should stroll eastward?" And Herbert smiled mysteriously, as one with experience. "I told you we made our own etiquette—laws are for the benefit of the community. *We* are the community, we four, the only civilized beings in a loutish world. We began as a triumvirate, but your coming has changed the form of government. You are the fourth party. We are now—what shall I say?—a constitutional quartette."

As Herbert rattled on, Matthew felt more and more the fascination of his gay cousin, whose white teeth flashed as facetiously as in the days of yore, and whose lissome figure was a continuous pleasure to the artistic eye. Gratitude mingled with his admiration; but for Herbert's ingenuity he would never have been a citizen of the earthly paradise that was opening before him. The smoke of his cigar rose like incense on the solemn air, upon which the sound of the wind and the sea broke like a hush. Under foot were gorse and bracken, mixed with sparse sprouts of grass; overhead a rich yellow half-moon, partly hidden by scowling clouds, but throwing a band of pale gold, that changed with the deepening dusk to rippling silver, across the sombre bay, in whose distant cliffs the lights of vague scattered villages twinkled mysteriously, suggesting romantic windows of illumined hollow chambers in the steep rock. And presently white figures were seen advancing slowly to meet them, pausing each instant as if to drink in the beauty of the night.

"Ah, there they are!" cried Herbert.

"No, there are three of them," said Matthew, in disappointed tones.

"That's the maid, carrying a reserve of wraps, you duffer! Don't throw away your cigar. There's Olive herself with a cigarette, if my eyes do not deceive me."

But Matthew Strang's cigar went out ere the two parties—sauntering more slowly than before they had become unconscious of each other—were startled to find themselves face to face. His heart was beating furiously as if he were really startled by the apparition of a queenly figure and a lovely flushed face on the background of the night. A smile danced in the eyes and parted the red lips with an expression of more eager welcome than had ever been accorded him in town; and there was a more intimate pressure in the clasp of the warm hand, subtly heralding a new phase in their friendship, in this disappearance of the conventional stage properties of the fashionable human scene, in this isolation amid the primitiveness of nature, and of a humanity simpler than their own; while Miss Regan's cigarette and her frank laugh and hand-shake indicated less subtly, but no less pleasantly, the commencement of a semi-Bohemian artistic period which loomed more agreeably to Matthew than any of the periods Herbert had boasted of living in.

"Welcome to the Creamery," said Olive, "or rather to the Ice-Creamery, as we've had to call it lately."

"Then why don't you put on your wraps?" said Matthew, anxiously.

"Oh, it's comparatively tropical to-night, and we had to give Primitiva a pretext for accompanying us. This is Primitiva (*née* Rose) the ex-post." The pretty lass made a courtesy. "She was the post, you know, when we first came. She used to bring letters from the post-office, which is near you, and our first acquaintance with the post was to find it in tears because it had lost a letter of ours. She had dropped it *en route*."

"Was it an important letter?" asked Matthew.

"That is very nearly a bull, Mr. Strang," replied Olive. "However, as the letter was picked up by a coast-guard, I am able to tell you it wasn't of the slightest importance—merely a

request from Mr. Harold Lavender to be allowed to dedicate his next book of poems to Nor. Still it might have been important; it might have contained a P.O.M."

"Do you mean a poem or a post-office order?" laughed Mrs. Wyndwood, turning a flippant face towards Matthew's, over which a cloud had come like that now entirely over the moon.

"Neither," said Olive, gravely; "a P.O.M., a proposal of marriage. But wasn't it odd to see the post crying? I fell in love with her at once. I saw that such a quaint creature would do more good to me than to Her Majesty's service, and so, hey, presto! she was whisked from the post-office and changed into a tire-woman."

"And, oh! what a refreshing contrast with the London servant," added Mrs. Wyndwood. "Primitiva is really a servant, not a critic on the hearth."

"Yes," said Olive, "she believes that all London ladies smoke, and considers Nor eccentric for not indulging. And whatever I tell her is gospel; she thinks I'm like George Washington—invariably truthful."

"Then she thinks you eccentric, too," said Herbert, smiling back.

Olive's eyes danced; her lips quivered trying to keep back the smile of response.

"Save your cynicism for town, sir," she said. "Primitiva doesn't think anything of the kind. The world is not a whited sepulchre to her. It is lucky I removed her from the sphere of your blighting influence."

"Yes," grumbled Herbert. "She's our farmer's daughter, Matt. And she might have hovered about our dinner-table."

"I couldn't leave Marguerite in the way of Faust," said Olive, plumply.

Matthew Strang winced; Miss Regan's plain speaking grated upon him, and he saw that Mrs. Wyndwood had lowered her eyes in like annoyance and had commenced to walk homewards. And he resented this preoccupation with Primitiva; he feared she was going to play the part of the dog, Roy. Herbert hummed an operatic bar or two and broke off laughing: "I

wish I had Faust's voice. A lovely tenor voice was apparently among the profits of his bargain with the devil."

Miss Regan laughed merrily. "Are you going back, Nor?" she called out.

"Yes," said Mrs. Wyndwood. "We must say good-night."

"Oh, we must see you home," protested Matthew, as he moved to her side.

"There's really no need," she returned. "We sha'n't meet anybody."

"But it's so dark," said Matthew, for the moon still dallied behind its cloud-rack, and threw only a faint wavering circle of light on the weird water, though the stars were now clear enough.

"Then, come along!" cried Olive, bounding forwards, from Herbert's side, rather to his disgust. "Run straight home, Primitiva." And, waving her cigarette-tip in the darkness, she disappeared in the earth like a red witch.

Herbert dashed after her down the cliff descent. The exhilaration of their spirits caught Eleanor. She was swallowed down abruptly. Matthew followed more cautiously, wondering. And then began a mad, unforgetable, breakneck, joyous scramble in the darkness down the steepest and craggiest of roughly worn paths, diversified by great sheer gaps without foothold for a goat, down which they had to drop. At first Matthew tried to steady and help himself by clutching at the vegetation and bushes through which the path broke, but it was all blackberry-bushes and prickly gorse, and his involuntary interjections were answered by peals of mocking laughter from the invisible pioneer below.

"How do you like seeing us home?" she called up.

But Matthew was rapt far beyond the sting of taunts and blackberry-bushes. Mrs. Wyndwood was only a few inches ahead of him; every moment she turned to cheer him on, and her face was close to his, and the divine darkness was filled with light and perfume. Twice or thrice in this topsy-turvy harum-scarum descent she gave him a helping hand, as one familiar with the ground, and he took it with no sense of unmanliness. "Be careful here," she said once, "or the brambles

will scratch your face," and she looked up adorably from her insecure perch below, holding the prickly net-work apart with her upper arm as he slid cautiously towards her, blissfully conscious that this sharing of common—if petty—peril was bringing them together beyond the reach of ceremonial coldness for evermore. Sometimes the gray sea showed below through the interstices on the left, and its dull boom mingled with the gentle swish of the wind and the gurgle of a little waterfall. The last twenty feet were the worst, and they were aggravated by the banter of the couple safely below. Herbert had never caught up with Olive, who had skeltered down like a wild-cat, leaving a trail of gay ejaculations; but Mrs. Wyndwood herself had to be helped in the precipitous windings of the base, with its tiny niches of crumbling stone at long intervals, and now in sweet revenge Matthew held her hand to steady her from above, while below Herbert waited with open arms for her final jump. An odd recollection of his climbing down the steeple in Economy flashed through his brain, as he himself half slipped, half leaped to the ground, hot and red and breathless; and gratitude for the miraculous metamorphosis in his fortunes added to the tenderness of his mood. How good it was to be alive—there in the brave night, moneyed and famous and still young, glowing with physical well-being—amid a joyous human company, with a delightful friend and cousin, and two brilliant and beautiful ladies, both members of that fashionable world which had once filled him with envious bitterness, and one of them a woman whose presence made everything magical. Rosina was very shadowy now.

They seemed in a great closed circle, walled by cliffs, with a roof fretted by stars. Two glooming pools made dark patches in the lighter soil, and they heard the stir of fish.

"A deserted stone quarry," Olive explained.

"There are carp in the pools," said Herbert.

"We live outside," said Mrs. Wyndwood.

"It's nearer over the cliff and more ladylike," added Olive.

"It was hardly fair to Mr. Matthew Strang, though," Eleanor remarked, smiling. "We've all learned the way in the daylight. When you see it in the morning, Mr. Strang, you'll find it some-

times within a few inches of the sheer precipice, and if you had caught hold of the bushes to stay your fall you would have dropped them like a hornet's nest. We ought to have warned him—in the dark, too."

"If we had warned him he would have fallen," laughed Olive, gayly. "Anybody could walk a four-inch plank over a precipice if he thought it was on the ground. Ignorance is salvation. But you will have to come in, Strangs, and brush yourselves before you go. What a nuisance your both having the same name. When I insult Mr. Herbert I shall excite the animosity of Mr. Matthew, and vice versa. I really think, Nor, we shall have to call them by their Christian names."

"Only when they're together," said Mrs. Wyndwood, smiling.

"We must always stick together, Matt," cried Herbert, with jocose enthusiasm. "Your hand, Matt."

"We might call one the Painter," began Mrs. Wyndwood, "and the other—"

"No, that's ungrateful," Olive remonstrated, "after the beautiful success Mr. Herbert has made of you."

"I meant Mr. Herbert," replied Eleanor, roguishly, and for once Olive had no retort ready.

"No, even taking the portrait into account, Matt's the Painter," said Herbert, placing his hand lovingly on the shoulder of his friend, who thrilled with a sense of his cousin's large-heartedness. "Call me the Playwright."

"You are both Painters," Miss Regan persisted. "But the problem is solved — one is Mr. Herbert and the other Mr. Matthew." She took Eleanor's arm and led the way to the house.

"Since when are you a playwright, Mr. Herbert?" asked Matthew, as they fell a little into the rear.

"None of *your* sarcasm, you beggar. I've always been a playwright. Don't you remember my doing a burlesque for the Academy students? I'm writing a comedy in the evenings—the lessee of the Folly is a friend of mine—I must make some money now—there's that hundred pounds I owe you—and I know I'm not going to make it by painting."

"But surely you will let me know if you want anything,"

said Matthew, with genuine concern, for there seemed something immoral in the idea of Herbert feeling the pinch of need, to say nothing of his shock at finding that his cousin had run through all that money. Herbert had, indeed, several times hinted at his impecuniosity, but Matthew had never taken him seriously.

Herbert shook his head. "I know you're a brick, old chap, but a hundred pounds is as much as I care to owe any one man."

"But you don't consider me *any* one man."

"Ah! it's awfully good of you to remember that I did as much for you — comparatively speaking — in your tenpenny times, but still it isn't quite agreeable to find one's bread on the waters after many days. I never did like soaked bread, even in milk. The most I could do would be to let you settle up every week with Primitiva's father. But it's really halves, mind you, and when my comedy is produced, you'll have to reckon with me. They like what I've written—the women—they think it 'll make a hit—I read them the night's work after lunch the next day—of course, I always lunch with them after the morning's sitting. Ah, here we are!"

They had emerged from the sheltered quarry and met the smack of the salt wind from the moaning sea-front. A lawn ran out to meet the pebbly beach, from which it was separated by a low stone wall; the ancient slate-roofed house stood out radiantly cheerful against the dusky background of the night and the cliffs. Primitiva was at the door looking out anxiously, and a man-servant shared her anxiety, or at least her vigil.

"How delightful!" exclaimed Matthew.

"Yes, weren't we lucky?" said Mrs. Wyndwood. "It's an old family residence. The owner kept it untenanted for thirty years, and has never consented to let it before."

The ladies took off their things while the men brushed themselves in the hall, where, divided by a heavily carved barometer, a pair of faded oil-paintings hung—a gentleman in a wig and a lady in a coif. These reminded Miss Regan that Matthew must see how splendidly Herbert's portrait of Mrs. Wyndwood had turned out after all. "The rogue!" she cried. "As soon as

he thought the sittings were to cease, the picture picked up wonderfully! And now he's dilly-dallying with it again!"

So they wandered through the large rambling house with its old-fashioned belongings till they reached the room which Herbert had been allowed to use as a studio. Matthew saw with joy that Herbert had let the glorious face and figure be as he himself had painted them in that spurt of inspiration, and had confined his own attention to the minutiæ of the dress, which was nearly finished. Olive held a lamp to it, awaiting his praises. He had a moment of embarrassment.

"She is very beautiful," he said, ambiguously, but rapturously. Then, turning to Herbert, he added, heartily, "If your comedy is only as good, old fellow—"

"It will be," said Mrs. Wyndwood, enthusiastically. "Who should write comedy if not a man like Mr. Strang—I mean Mr. Herbert—a man who has seen the manners of men and cities? I should think he could do it even better than he can paint."

"But he has one disadvantage," said Olive, gloomily. "He is witty."

Herbert stood bowing with his hand on his breast in mock acknowledgment. His boyish face looked flushed and handsome in the lamplight. Matthew had a spasm of despair—a momentary sense of being an outsider.

"Don't practise your footlights bow here," said Olive. "No one has called 'author!'"

"'Many are called, but few chosen,'" quoted Herbert.

"I wonder how I should come out under *your* brush?" said Eleanor, turning to Matthew. His black fit vanished; he was taken back again into the charmed circle. But the question remained awkward.

"Not more beautiful than this," he murmured. "Perhaps you will give me the pleasure. I am here to paint—partly, that is."

"Perhaps in town; not here. I want to be out and about. Olive, we must give them something before they go back through the cold night."

Olive rang the bell and ordered refreshment. They adjourned to the drawing-room, a spacious apartment, with strange heavy antique furniture and curious bronzes and vases, the *ensemble*

made more quaint by the irrelevant presence of a grandfather's chair, with its high, stiff canvas back.

"I fished that up from the kitchen," said Olive. "It's jolly to sit there and imagine one's self an old crone nodding to one's last sleep."

She seated herself upon it forthwith, nid-nodding, and against the white canvas her dark face shone, lovely and young and more provoking by the suggestive contrast.

Herbert stood over her, fidgeting, his fingers drumming nervously on the canvas awning.

She sprang up and threw back the lid of a mahogany instrument, and began to play a joyous melody.

Matthew had seated himself in an arm-chair near the window. Eleanor, her superb arms and neck bare, was opposite him, a wonderful white vision in the soft-toned light. He caught her eyes and they smiled at him, the friendly smile that means nothing and everything.

As Olive touched the keys, his breast grew tenderer; where had he heard those tinkling harmonies before? His dead childhood came back to him for a moment—it was a harpsichord, and the last person he had heard playing it was Ruth Hailey. A vision of her girlish figure flitted before him, then passed into the picture of the young woman with the sweet earnest eyes that Billy had conjured up, then faded into the sweeter vision of reality, as, through eyes still misty, he saw Eleanor's bosom softly rising and falling with the melody, the joyous soul of which sparkled in her eager eyes. The tune grew merrier, madder. Herbert was at the player's side now; he was talking to her as her long, white fingers darted among the keys. Suddenly the music jarred and stopped; Olive leaped up and ran to the window and threw it open, and a cold wind swept in, and the solemn sobbing of the waves.

"There it is," she cried, "the great lonely blackness, roaring outside like a wild beast in its lonely agony. We shut it out with our walls, and hang them with pictures and plaques, but there it is all the same, and all our tapestries cannot quite deaden its wail. Don't you hear it in the darkness, don't you hear it crying out there—the pain of the world?"

Mrs. Wyndwood sprang up in alarm and closed the window.

"Olive, Olive, calm yourself," she said, tenderly, pressing the girl's face to her bosom.

Olive broke from her with a peal of laughter. "You look as if you had seen a ghost, Nor. Are you afraid of the black night that you shut it out? Are you out of tune with it already?"

"You exaggerate the pain of the world, dearest," said Eleanor, soothingly.

Herbert looked startled. "The pain of the world?" he said. "The futility of the world, you mean. People eat and drink and go to theatres, and over their graves the parson prates of infinities and immortalities. Religion is too big for us. We're like mice in a cathedral."

"You are right." Olive dropped wearily into the grandfather's chair. "God said, 'Let man be,' and *nascitur ridiculus mus.*"

Eleanor's eyes kindled. "We are small most times," she said. "But there are moments when, as Wordsworth says:

> "'Through Love, through Hope, and Faith's transcendent dower,
> We feel that we are greater than we know.'

I'm not afraid, Olive. There! I open the window again. Come and look—not at the black night, but up at the stars."

Matthew's soul melted in worship. He moved to her side and, refreshed by the cool sea air, lifted his eyes to the far-sprinkled vault where the moon had now suffused the dark clouds, which seemed to have grown light and porous. The two infinities of sky and sea brooded together in the night, ineffably solemn.

Olive would not budge. "The stars!" she shuddered. "Big, lonely worlds."

Mrs. Wyndwood did not hear her. "Ah, there's the Plough," she said; "and there's the Polar Star in a straight line, and there's Cassiopeia. And that's all I know. But, oh! surely they are havens of rest, where the tears are wiped from all faces." Her voice faltered, her face was rapt as in prayer.

"Won't you put something over your shoulders?" Matthew said, anxiously.

"No; it's quite warm. Unless perhaps we take a turn up and down the beach before you go; shall we? It looks so divine out there."

He was startled and intoxicated by the proposal.

"Won't you come, too, Olive? It's nearly ten o'clock. We must be sending them home to their farm, or Primitiva's father will bar the door. Already we have a reputation for witchcraft because our house shines afar at eleven o'clock, a beacon of evil to all the neighboring hamlets. In London we should just be preparing to go out."

"I am tired, Nor. You can have a turn, if you like. You go, too, Mr. Herbert."

Herbert hesitated. "No, it wouldn't be fair to leave you alone."

"Does company prevent one from being alone?"

"I've *got* to have a turn in a moment, anyhow," said Herbert, weakly. "A *re*turn, alas!"

"We'll leave them to fight it out." And Mrs. Wyndwood laid her hand a moment on Matthew's shoulder, thrilling him. They went out under the stars. She had taken only a light, fleecy wrap, beneath which the white shoulders were half defined, half divined. They went across the lawn and through the gate, and crunching lightly over the little pebbles, walked towards where the surf bubbled white in the grayness. All was very still, save for the eternal monotone of the sea. There were a few yellow glimmers from the villages on the cliffs. Far to the east a light-house sent watery rays across the night. They stood without speaking, in a religious ecstasy, breathing in the salt air.

At last the delicious silence was broken by her more delicious voice.

"I am so glad you came," she said, simply.

His breast swelled painfully.

"You are very good to me."

"Oh, I mean your cousin will have company."

"Is that all?" he said, audaciously.

"And then, he likes to be with Miss Regan."

"Is that all?"

She smiled.

"You are too ambiguous. The plain truth is that your cousin prefers to talk to Miss Regan alone, and I didn't care about appearing a marplot. You know the proverb."

He was never shrewd. Harassed as he had been by his own affairs, Herbert's admiration of Olive had never struck him as a serious passion. He conceived his cousin as a philandering person, a man of many flirtations. But now the suggestion that came from Eleanor's lips seemed to throw a flood of light on everything, even on Herbert's remark about forbidden fruit. For once Herbert was veritably in love. In his relief at the butterfly's choice of a definite flower he forgot to resent Mrs. Wyndwood's reason for giving himself her company.

"Are you sure it isn't you he admires?" he asked, merely for the pleasure of her denial.

"Oh no! I'm an old, staid, prosaic, mature widow. My romance is over," she sighed.

She never looked more spiritual than thus in the moonlight. But he could never bring himself to the conventional compliments. He asked, simply:

"And what about Miss Regan?"

"Ah! I should not tell you if I knew, and I don't know. I don't profess to understand Miss Regan. I never knew any one so easy to live with and so difficult to understand. But, as she doesn't understand herself, I don't feel humiliated. Of course she has always had men at her feet, and she has refused one of the most brilliant *partis* in the kingdom. I was afraid she hated men, and I'm still uncertain. If she ever does marry I think it will be to spite her relatives, to make them lament she has thrown herself away. Did I tell you that she quarrelled with them all and came to live with me?"

"Yes, you told me. And you were unhappy then?"

She passed her hand across her eyes, but did not speak.

"You are not unhappy now?"

She smiled. "Are you fishing for compliments?"

"ALL WAS VERY STILL SAVE FOR THE ETERNAL MONOTONE OF THE SEA"

"Indeed not. Only I am so sorry for you." His voice trembled.

"Let us walk along," she said.

He obeyed. "You are not angry with me for being sorry?" he faltered.

"No, sympathy is always sweet. Though I do not deserve it, some people will tell you."

"What people?" he asked, fiercely.

"Olive's people. They all say I saddened my husband's last hours. He was brought home dead from the hunting-field, you know. He had been—but, no! *de mortuis nil nisi bonum.*"

"Tell me," he said, softly.

She began to speak, then broke off. "No, why should I tell you?" she said, gently.

"Because—because—I want to be your friend."

Her bosom heaved. She caught her breath.

"It was a vile sporting-house." She shuddered. "He left me with an oath on his lips."

Matthew Strang was at boiling-point. He ground the pebbles furiously under his foot. Oh, the infamy of Society! That this lily should have been handled roughly! It was sacrilege. And yet, in some subtle way, he felt her more human than before. She, too—painful as it was to realize it—had known the mire of life; she, too, this delicate flower of womanhood! though it had left her unsullied, ethereal still. Then she would understand what he had gone through, she would know how coarse and unlovely life could be. He felt strangely nearer to her heart at this moment; some icy partition had melted away.

She ceased walking, and put both hands over her face. The fleecy wrap quivered on her shoulders. He waited in silent reverence.

"Perhaps I *was* inconsiderate," she said at last, lifting her face dimmed with tears, "not forbearing enough."

"You angel!" he whispered.

"You'll hear another story from his people. All—except Olive. They will tell you that—that I am a—" she smiled wistfully—"a flirt."

He had no words hot enough. He kicked a stone savagely.

"The vile slanderers!" he cried. "They are all tarred with the same brush. You're lucky to be done with them."

"There was young Gerard Brode staying in the house, a mere boy up from Oxford and bubbling over with Socialism. I was interested in his theories and we had long talks, and I tried to convert Douglas—that was my poor husband—and to persuade him that we ought to divide our property with everybody; but he met me with coarse ribaldry, and said he wasn't going to divide his wife with any man, least of all a whipper-snapper like Gerard Brode, and feeble taunts like that, and that was the beginning of our dissensions."

"Poor Mrs. Wyndwood!" he said, and felt it a sweet privilege to pity her. "And so you spent your fortune on the movement."

She smiled sadly. "Scarcely my fortune. Poor Douglas never lived to inherit, and I wasn't born with a gold spoon in my mouth, though it had a crest on it. But who has been telling you about my indiscretions?" She did not wait for an answer, adding: "But, there, you know all about me now," and her pathetic smile had a dazzling *camaraderie*, though it flickered away as she wound up meditatively: "I wonder why I told you. Shall we go in?"

"Not yet," he pleaded, hastily. "Oh, if you knew how proud I am of your confidences! That they should be made to me—to me! Oh, if you knew what my life has been!" He felt choking.

"You terrify me," she returned, lightly. "Nothing very dreadful, I trust."

"I am nothing, nobody." He struggled with his voice. "I have slept in the streets. I have consorted with the vilest."

"All the more honor to you that you are fine."

"Oh, if I had met you before! You would have inspired me, uplifted me."

"No higher than you are."

"Ah, you don't understand. I have been so poor."

"Poverty is not a crime."

"I have been in prison."

"You were innocent!" Her face shone.

"It was only for debt. I was the victim of a bankruptcy, and I have paid it all off since. But the stain remains."

"On the laws that put you there."

He gulped down the great lump that made his throat dry and painful. "I was born in a poor Nova-Scotian village. No one cared for Art."

She stooped down and plucked up a sea-pink. "See! how sturdily it grows among the stones!"

Now all the pent-up self-pity of the long, solitary years burst forth in a great torrent, breaking through the proud, passionate reserve that no living being had ever penetrated; his soul yielded up its secrets in a strange blend of pride, self-depreciation, and yearning for the woman's sympathy.

"I have had to carry the hod, to climb the mast."

"You climbed nearer heaven."

"Ah, but I swabbed the deck."

"You touched life at first hand. I have never envied you so much as now. We never get near its secret, we idle rich."

"You glorify my past for me. I see it now as a divine education. I have been living for false ideals. Oh, if you could glorify my future!"

"I should be proud to inspire it!" The flash in her eyes passed to his.

"If I could see you every day, if I could tell you my hopes, my dreams. But what am I asking? It is impossible. You are the beautiful Mrs. Wyndwood, and I—"

"A genius, a Master! Towering over a humble slave!"

Her eyes, swimming in tears, but shining still, like stars through rain, sought his in humble adoration. Never had he pictured such a look from her. He shook, divining undreamed-of possibilities. For a moment he forgot everything. He caught her hot hand and held it to his lips. In that frenzy of divine fever, half fire, half tears, he felt again that love rationalized life. An infinity of thought and emotion was concentred in the instant; his long, sordid struggles, his craving for happiness, the infinite yearning with which as a boy in a lonely forest he had looked up at the stars. This was the secret of his yearning, this the flash that illumined life. And underlying and inter-

tangled with everything, an astonishment at the vast sweep of life, the possibilities it held. Last night Rosina and Camden Town; to-night Eleanor and the sea and the stars.

She drew her hand away gently, though there was no rebuke in the withdrawal, murmuring, "We must be going in," and straightway the image of Rosina arose sinister and vindictive, her voice raucous and strained to a ghastly jocosity, crying, "Kisses, they're off!" And then, as he moved silently towards the house, thrilling with the memory of her hand and her look, prisoned sobs still fluttering at his throat, he had a sudden paradoxical intuition that if he spoke of his wife, as he had been on the point of doing, something would go out of the magic of those touches and glances, all spiritual though they were. The figure of Rosina—sinister and vindictive—would stand between their souls, troubling their most transcendental moments. Was not a man's wife the natural recipient of his confidences, the nurse of his Art? And then, if Eleanor knew that he was ashamed of his wife, that he had always passed as a bachelor, would she not deem him contemptible? The fine ethical sense that had refused to despise him for material degradations, would it not certainly scorn him for moral weaknesses? A great temptation took him not to imperil by indiscreet speech the footing he had won. But his soul had been moved to its depths. To be false—and with her!

"I have not told you all, Mrs. Wyndwood."

"You can tell me nothing nobler."

That was like an icy wind. He walked on storm-tossed. They came to a jutting crag, skirted it, and the house rose radiant in the hollow of the cliff. He had an aching vision of their living there together, she and he, with all the dear domesticities of wedded union. His fancy feigned them re-entering now their joint domain. The pretence left his heart sick and empty. They walked across the lawn. "You would not call me noble," he said, coming to an abrupt stand-still, "if you knew that I—"

He flinched under the sceptical, confident smile she threw over her shoulder.

"That I am married."

The half-mocking smile faded from the beautiful face, and

with it the color. She turned her head again towards the house, but she was not moving forward.

He was glad he had not to meet her eyes. The sea broke solemnly with a fused roar of irregular waves, and he wondered why the sound was so continuous. A cricket's chirp in the cliff-bushes seemed to him extraordinarily loud. He looked up at the stars. Were the tears, indeed, wiped from all eyes in those shining islands, he thought, or were they only dead, lonely worlds? Or were they alive and full of unhappy people like the star he stood on?

She spoke at last, with a catch in her breath and a strained smile in her voice.

"Why should that make me think less of you?"

He caught only the celestial reassurance of her reply. How fine, how sympathetic she was! But he hastened to immolate himself. Her unexpected question had thrown him off the track; he forgot that his *concealment* of his marriage was the only circumstance for which he had foreseen the world's blame, and he answered, desperately,

"Because I married for money."

"For money," she repeated, in a toneless voice.

He was cold and sick with shame. Despite her experience of the coarser side of life, such a contingency was, he felt, quite beyond her comprehension. That money played no part in her consciousness he would have divined, even if her friend had not informed him of the fact in their first talk. An impulse had driven him to humble himself, a counter-instinct now spurred him to excuse himself.

"It was to pursue my art career," he said, deprecatingly. Even now he would not speak of the younger children he had had to support.

She turned her head again, and the smile was struggling back, and her voice had an echo of the old enthusiastic ring.

"Then you married for Art, not for money!"

"Ah, do not comfort me! My God, how I am punished!"

She veered round now. Her tones were low and trembling with compassion.

"Is she a bad woman?"

"She is worse! She is a good woman. All her thoughts are on the household; it is unbearable. Never a thought of anything but the kitchen and cabbages."

"Poor woman!" she said.

The prisoned sobs could hardly be choked back now.

"The world does not know. I have been ashamed of her. Now you see how low I am, you cannot respect me."

Her voice was almost a whisper.

"I respect you the more for what you have done in despite of her. You have had a hard life."

"Oh, have I not?" and a sob escaped at last.

"Compose yourself. We must go in."

"You will be my friend all the same?"

"Yes, I will be your friend. Your confidences are safe in my keeping. There is my hand."

He took it again and held it fast, feeling its warm response. "You make me so happy! Life will not be empty now." He struggled with the lump in his throat. "With your friendship, what can I not achieve? You shall tell me what I am to strive for."

"It is too great a responsibility. It was all very well to criticise. I sha'n't know what to say."

"You need say nothing. I shall look into your eyes and read it there."

He looked into them now, and they were not lowered. They were full of sympathetic sweetness, glistening behind tears.

"I am afraid they are rather red," she said, with a melancholy smile. "If I am not careful they may betray your confidences."

She moved forward in the direction of the water, and he, turning on his heel, followed, wondering. By a salt pool near the rim of the billows she bent down and bathed her face. To see her half kneeling in the moonlight affected him like reading poetry; and as she washed off the traces of the tears he had made her shed, it seemed to him as if their spiritual friendship were being consecrated by some mystic baptism.

They went in. Olive had not moved from her indolent attitude in the grandfather's chair. Herbert was standing at the window-curtain.

"I'm so glad you've come in," she said, yawning. "Mr. Herbert has been sulking at having been left behind, and I have been snapping his head off for not leaving me to myself."

"Yes; Miss Regan speaks the truth for once," said Herbert, audaciously.

"Oh, I am glad Primitiva is not here to have her ideal shattered. Good-night—before you get ruder."

"Good-night," he responded, "before you get truthfuller."

"Take care of him to-night, Mr. Matthew. He is irresponsible. Don't go by the cliff route."

"Not I. Good-night, Miss Regan. Good-night, Mrs. Wyndwood." And that dear secret pressure thrilled his palm again.

In a few moments the two cousins were marching with measured step along the winding road. Herbert had lit a cigar, but Matthew was busy enough chewing the cud of his memories.

"Olive was rather strange to-night," said Herbert, breaking the silence of the cliff-tops.

"Not more than usual, surely?" answered Matthew.

"That's your conventionality and your ignorance of women. I never found her strange except to-night with her nonsense about the pain of the world."

"She's talked to me like that before several times; she thinks people with souls can't be happy. I suppose it's Mrs. Wyndwood's influence over her natural flippancy."

"Ah, perhaps so. But why so formal, Matt? You have my permission to call her Eleanor."

"Thank you," said Matthew, with a forced smile.

"I hope you enjoyed your *tête-à-tête* more than I did. Not that there isn't a certain fascination in sparring. But perhaps you fought, too."

He returned a staccato "No."

After a silence accentuated by the tramp, tramp of their automatic feet as they swung along, he said: "I told her I was married."

Herbert gave a long whistle. "The devil you did! And you don't call that fighting? What a knock-down blow!"

"What do you mean?" Matthew murmured.

"D' you mean to say you don't know the woman is in love with you?"

Matthew's blood made delicious riot in his veins. He saw that strange look of worship in her eyes again.

"Nonsense!" he jerked, thickly. "The Honorable Mrs. Wyndwood in love with me!"

"I didn't say the Honorable Mrs. Wyndwood. I said the woman. Trust me. Behind all the titles and the purple and the fine linen—there's flesh and blood."

"It is impossible. In love with *me!*"

"You may well be astonished, you duffer. To fix her affections on you with me in the neighborhood! But women were always strange. And men were deceivers ever."

"All the more reason I shouldn't deceive her. How glad I am I told her the truth. I breathe easier, there's a weight off my mind."

"You selfish beggar! And now it's all over between you, I suppose, and our nice little constitutional quartette is broken up. And I thought it was going to be so jolly when you came down. Heigho!"

"Don't be afraid," said Matthew, with a touch of bitterness. "Eleanor—Mrs. Wyndwood and I are going to be better friends than ever—thank God!"

"Thank whom? Don't be blasphemous."

"Thank God," repeated Matthew, firmly.

"Oh, well, you were always a Methodist parson. But if I were a Jew, I wouldn't say grace over pork. Not a bad epigram that; I must get it into my comedy."

Matthew shuddered. Herbert's tone was desecrating. "You don't understand," he said.

"Don't plume yourself on your superior intelligence, old man. Mine's quite equal to the study of Plato. It isn't such Greek to me as you imagine."

"Well, whatever you think, you are quite wrong," he replied, with spirit. "Our friendship is on a different plane. It is based on our common interest in Art—and Mrs. Wyndwood's not the sort of woman you've had experience of."

"Well, that's cool! How do you know what sort of women

I've had experience of? Besides, a woman is a woman. The world—our world, that is—is full of Greek scholars who study Plato. Strictly under the rose. Society is only an incarnate wink."

"I should put that into the comedy," sneered Matthew.

"It's a quotation from it," laughed Herbert. "Had you there, my boy."

It nearly came to a quarrel. But Herbert good-naturedly said he must save Matthew from himself, and he fervently hoped his cousin would not confide in any more women. "You can't syndicate a secret," he said, sternly.

At the house they had left, things were equally disturbed. Mrs. Wyndwood retired at once to bed, throwing herself upon it in her clothes; and her delicate white shoulders, which, like her emotions, had no need to be covered up now, rose and fell spasmodically. After a while she got up, bathed her eyes again, in fresh water this time, and went into Olive's room. Miss Regan was brushing her dusky tresses savagely. She had sent her maid to bed.

"Nice hours," she growled.

"You'll catch cold, dear," Eleanor replied, gently, for a window was wide open at the bottom.

"Nonsense, Nor," said Olive, petulantly. "I should like to sleep on the beach."

"What, in this costume?"

"One bathes in less. Still, while you're here—"

She closed the window with a bang.

"Olive! You make my heart jump."

"Really? I'm not a man."

Mrs. Wyndwood colored painfully, then looked at her with brimming eyes of reproach. "And this is my reward for leaving you *tête-à-tête*."

"Leaving *me tête-à-tête*. I thought that was a by-product."

Mrs. Wyndwood controlled her vexation. "I said just now I had never known any one so easy to live with. Don't make me change my opinion, dear."

"So you've been discussing me with Matthew! And what right have you to discuss me with anybody? Oh, how hateful

everybody is! I know what it is. You'd like to see me brought down to your level."

"Good-night, Miss Regan. You will apologize in the morning."

"Don't glare. The level of womanhood, if you like. You've loved a man."

Eleanor's face flushed. "That is the height of womanhood, Olive."

"Oh yes—fine phrases! The height of womanhood!" She drew a comb fiercely through her hair. "To hang on a man's lips, to feel a foolish sense of blankness when he isn't there, and a great wave of joyful pain when he heaves in sight again. To kiss his every little note! To think of him and your trivial self as the centre of the universe, and to want the planets to spin for your joint happiness—oh!" She pulled the comb viciously through a knot.

"You describe it very accurately, Olive," said her friend, maliciously.

"I'm quoting the novels. This passion that they crack up so much seems nothing more than selfishness at compound interest."

"Selfishness! When you yourself say it makes you yearn for the other person's happiness."

"So that it may subserve yours."

"You are a cynic."

"What is a cynic? An accurate observer of life. Oh, you needn't smile. I know I'm quoting, but one can't put quotation marks into one's conversation. You can't face the facts of life, Nor. You like dull people without insight."

"I like you."

"That's too cheap. You like socialists and spiritualists and poets and painters—the whole spawn of idealists. Bah! They ought to have a month's experience of a hospital."

"The world isn't a hospital ward, Olive. The people I like have the truer insight."

"What insight has your Matthew Strang?"

"He is as much yours as mine."

"Don't shuffle out of the question."

"His insight expresses itself through his work. He doesn't talk."

"Is that a hit at his cousin?" queried Olive, savagely. "If so, it falls remarkably flat, considering Herbert Strang paints as well as talks."

"Olive, why will you put words into my mouth? You know how much I admire Herbert Strang."

"Ah, then you have more insight than I gave you credit for. You may even understand that a cynic is only a disappointed idealist, a saint plus insight. His soul is a palace of truth; society and its shams come to the test, yield up their implicit falseness, and are scornfully rejected. The stroke of wit is made with the sword of judgment. Its shaft is the lightning of righteous indignation."

Mrs. Wyndwood felt this might pass well enough for an analysis of Olive's own cynicism, but she had her doubts as to its applicability to Herbert's.

Olive puzzled her frequently, and shocked her not seldom, but she felt instinctively that hers were the aberrations of a noble nature, while the cynicisms of Herbert jarred upon her without such reassurance of sweet bells jangled. Not that she doubted but that he, too, was much more idealistic than he made himself out—did he not write charming comedy love-scenes? Still he was a man who had seen the world, not a crude girl like Olive, and in the face of Olive's affectionate analysis of Herbert—which she rightly divined owed less to reason than to the growing love for him which she had long suspected in her turbulent friend—Eleanor felt vaguely that while jarring notes may be struck from the soundest keyboard, they may also be the index of an instrument hopelessly out of tune. Of course Herbert was not that, she was sure; he lacked Matthew's idealism and manly beauty, but he was handsome, too, in his daintier way, and charming and gifted, and probably the very husband to put an end to Olive's psychical growing-pains. All this mixture of acute and feeble insight occupied Eleanor's consciousness.

But all she said was, "Is that Emerson?"

"No, it's me. Now go to bed and sleep on it."

"I sha'n't. I couldn't sleep on anything so hard. Dear me, what a lot of hair-pins you have! What nice ones! I must borrow some."

"Take them all and go."

"Not yet."

"I shall blow out the candles," snapped Olive.

"I love talking in the dark. I'm pining for feminine conversation to soothe my overwrought nerves. How pretty that lace is!" Eleanor touched her friend's shoulder cajolingly. "What exquisite things you have! Everything—from hair-pins to carving-knives—perfect after its kind, like the animals that went into the ark. It will be difficult to give you a wedding present."

Olive laughed, despite herself.

"The only wedding present a woman wants is a husband."

"You have had plenty of those presents offered you, dear."

Olive shuddered violently. "Imagine existence with a Guardsman or—worse!—with that doddering young Duke! Dulness without idealism. Your Matthew Strang is endurable—he has at least the family idealism, the Strang goodness, though he carries it so much more heavily than his cousin. But a lifetime with a dull man—who wouldn't understand a joke—who would smile and smile and be a hypocrite! Oh, ye gods! I should shriek! In a year I should be in a lunatic asylum, or the Divorce Court. Oh, why do you women who have been through the mill egg us girls on? Is it the same instinct that makes an ex-fag send his boy to Eton? Or do you think it improves our health? I know you think me hysterical."

Mrs. Wyndwood flushed.

"Your tongue runs away with you, Olive. You'd do better to say your prayers. I'll leave you to them."

Olive laughed hilariously. "Aha! I thought that would get you to go. You always will forget that I've been in a hospital. Say my prayers, eh? Let me see, what shall I say? The one I used to say in the hospital, 'O Lord, I beseech Thee, let not this be counted unto me for righteousness, for Thou knowest, O Lord, that I can't help it.' But that's not applicable now. Suppose I say just what's in my heart, as the theologians recommend." She went down on her knees and said solemnly: "O

Lord, don't you think you are sometimes a little hard upon us? Don't you think we are born into a very confusing world? It would be so easy to do Thy will, to make Thy will our will, if we only knew what it was. Don't you think that half our life that might be devoted to Thy service is wasted because of the mist through which we grope, bearing the offering of our life in quest of we know not what Divine altar, and blurring the road more thickly with our tears?" She sprang up. "How's that for an addition to the Liturgy, Nor?"

"I am disgusted," said Mrs. Wyndwood, sternly. "Both blasphemous and ungrammatical."

Olive threw herself back on the bed, laughing unrestrainedly: "You delightful, stupid old thing. Ha! ha! ha! Blasphemous *and* ungrammatical! You Dissenting Hellenist! Sacrilege and Syntax! Ha! ha! ha! No, you sha'n't escape. You must abide the question. Tell me, O friend of my soul, why do women who have been unhappily married want to see other women victimized equally, like people who have been fooled in a penny show and come out laughing to beguile the other people?"

"That's not a fair analogy," said Eleanor, more gently.

Olive looked up archly, her arms under her head.

"No, perhaps not in your case. I dare say you're quite capable of marrying again, yourself. The triumph of hope over experience. Quotation marks, please. You're looking awfully handsome, Nor, and that saucy tilt of your nose spoils you for a saint. Speaking as an ex-sculptress, it's like a blunt pencil." She sprang up remorsefully: "Oh, I'm a beast. I apologize to your nose. I forgot the tip was a sore point."

Mrs. Wyndwood drew back in sorrowful hauteur. "I shall never marry again, Olive," she said, solemnly. There was an under-tone of self-pity, and her eyes were moist. She turned hastily and walked from the room with a firm, stately step.

Olive watched the sweep of the gown till it reached the door. Then she gave chase and renewed her apologies, and let Eleanor sob out sweet reconciliation on her shoulder.

After which she opened the window, sat on the side of the bed, and screwed up her ripe red lips to produce a perplexed whistle.

CHAPTER VII

THE IDYL CONCLUDES

They fleeted the days delightfully, as men did in the golden world. They rode together on the rolling moors, they drove through the Devonshire lanes, they strolled through combe and copse, they climbed the tors, they fished the leys, they swam in the sea, and when it was cloudy and cold, and the wind wailed about the house like a woman in pain, they listened to the comedy which Herbert wrote in those dreary days when the ladies drove off to distant houses for lunch or tennis or croquet. For they had not quite hidden their retreat or detached themselves from their kind.

"There's always scandal within a four-mile radius," as Miss Regan put it. "Is there on earth a greater piece of philanthropy than to give your neighbors food for gossip? Man cannot live by bread alone." Matthew asked her in concern if his and Herbert's visits were causing any talk.

"My dear Mr. Matthew," she replied, scornfully, "even an actress cannot escape scandal, especially if she goes into society. And truly society is so corrupt, I have often wondered that actresses' mothers allow them to go into it!"

During one of these absences of the feminine element, when Herbert went over to the house to put the last touches to the painted costume, grumbling at the boredom of such finicking work, Matthew gladly relieved him of the brush, and worked up the whole portrait, while Herbert lay smoking and thinking out the comedy.

Partly out of bravado, partly to enjoy the series of lovely views of dark-green sea and broken crags and nestling villages, the cousins invariably arrived by the cliff-path, seeing the black-

berries get riper every day. Sometimes they found the ladies sitting reading on the top of the cliff, which was furzy, with a road-side border of hemlock and dandelions and blue orchids, amid which their dainty parasols showed from afar like gigantic tropical flowers. Then while Matthew drowsed in the light of the sun and of Eleanor, inhaling the odors of bracken and thyme, lazily watching the white surf break far below, the brown trawlers glide across the horizon, the swallows swarm on the beach, and the wild ducks over the sea, Herbert and Olive would rattle away by the hour, often in verbal duels. Matthew Strang thought he had never tasted such pure intellectual joy. Art was often on the tapis; they classified the skies — to-day a Constable, and yesterday a Turner, and to-morrow a Corot. Herbert expounded glibly to the rapt Eleanor the Continental ideas, descanting on Manet and Monet. Nature lay all around them like a model to illustrate these theories, and Eleanor discovered all sorts of shadows and subtle effects she had never noticed before, all with the naïve joy of a child lighting on pretty treasures. She cried out that Art taught people to see Nature. And the Impressionists were right. Look over there! You couldn't tell whether it was a pool or a pile of fish. And the colors of things changed incessantly! Matthew would sometimes put in a word when appealed to by her, but never when the subject was music, concerning which he was as ignorant as the rest of the party was learned. Once Herbert maintained that the musician was better off than the painter, because his work remained, while pictures perished, destroyed by the aniline and bitumen in their own colors. "Even Mona Lisa's smile will fade," he said. "The artist lingers a little longer on the stage than the actor. Pictures are but paltry things at best, and few artists have brains or any large outlook upon life. They're a petty, quarrelsome clan." Matthew did not deny it.

Olive cited sculpture as a more durable art than the musician's, which only lived when performed. Mrs. Wyndwood was convinced that the joy of Art must be to the artist; she said she was fast acquiring a keen interest in the subjective side of Art, and feeling a growing desire to be an artist herself.

The Spiritual was all very well, but it needed to be expressed through the Beautiful.

Olive playfully suggested an expedition to the Latin Quarter; Mrs. Wyndwood accepted it seriously and eagerly; she returned to the idea again and again, both in public and in private. Why should they not go to Paris for the winter, and Olive take up sculpture again, and initiate her into the divine mysteries? To judge by the Strangs, artists must be delightful creatures to live among, and sculpture seemed easier and simpler than painting. Olive continued to play with the project. Herbert sneered at the idea of Miss Regan's return to the plaster of Paris. Literature was, after all, the only art, he said. It contained everything—music of words, painting of scenery, passion of drama. He almost converted Mrs. Wyndwood. She quoted ecstatically, "*L'univers a été fait pour aboutir à un beau livre.*" But a word from Matthew restored the balance.

They talked of life, too, of fate, free-will, and knowledge absolute, like Milton's archangels. Herbert, as Lucifer, steadfastly took the lowest views of human nature; now and then Olive's eye, twinkling with fun, met his as if in a secret understanding that Mrs. Wyndwood must be shocked at all hazards. He fought for the doctrine that sin was a human invention. "Let people have their fling. They exaggerate their powers of sinning. They think they can draw on a boundless internal reservoir of wickedness. As a matter of fact, their powers are singularly limited. They have too much original goodness. For my part, alas! I have found few opportunities of sinning."

"And have you never found opportunities for remorse?" Mrs. Wyndwood asked, scathingly.

"Alas! often, I tell you. Remorse for the sins I couldn't do. The remorse of your religious person is too often like the snivelling repentance of the condemned criminal. That murderer felt a truer remorse who was unexpectedly reprieved after indulging in an indigestible breakfast."

Olive laughed heartily. "That must go into the comedy."

It had become their stock phrase. Then remembering her part in the comedy was to score off Herbert, she capped his anecdote of the condemned criminal by another about the

politeness of a Frenchman, who, ascending the scaffold, said to his neighbor in the tumbril, "*Après vous.*"

Eleanor raised the talk to a more elevated plane, insisting on the value of remorse, and of suffering generally. "I would not recall one of my sufferings," said she, with her simple earnestness. "If I didn't suffer I shouldn't think I had grown." And her eyes instinctively sought Matthew's, and he thought she was reminding him of the educative efficacy of his own sufferings as well, and again Herbert's philosophy jarred.

And whatever she was saying or doing she always fell naturally into some attitude that enchanted his eye by its unaffected grace; always wore an expression whose sweetness and candor softened him in worship. Her beauty—to a painter's soul the miracle of miracles—she wore with a royal unconsciousness; he could not understand it. She was so simple, just like a human being. He saw her, not in her society drapings, but in all moods and weathers, and she bore the test. On fishing days they would draw up the boat in the centre of the nearest ley, where perch and "rudd" abounded, the former avid of the gentles, the latter only less eager for the paste, but demanding an iota of skill when hooked. Olive would take no hand in this mild sport; she had given up hunting and fishing, she said, when she rose in the ethical scale. Challenged as to her readiness to eat meat and fish, she failed to see the relevancy of the criticism. The reason she wouldn't kill other creatures was not that it gave them pain, but that it gave her pain; to eat them, on the contrary, gave her pleasure. Mrs. Wyndwood, however, though not callous enough to impale her own worms, was persuaded by Matthew to take a rod, and beguiled numbers of perch, and admitted to a thrill of savage joy each time she hauled up a leaping flash of silver. She was glad, though, she said, that the poor little fishes had horny membranes for gills, so that the hook should not hurt them; when it passed through the eye, she trusted that the cornea was insensitive, too.

"But how would you feel," Olive once remonstrated, "if, sitting at dinner, just after swallowing a mouthful of mayonnaise, and in the middle of a remark to your neighbor about the Rhine or the Pre-Raphaelites, you were suddenly to find yourself rising

towards the ceiling, at the end of a rope fixed by a hook to your upper lip, and arriving slowly but surely, despite your kicking and writhing, into a stratum of air totally devoid of oxygen?"

Herbert Strang thought one would feel like a fish out of water, but Matthew Strang eluded the point by drawing a pike across the track. The bait of a captured roach had fetched the monster, whose struggles interested even Olive, while Eleanor was wrought up to a wild enthusiasm for Matthew's prowess, and regretted that in Scotland she had always refused to go to see the grouse-shooting.

"I hear they are doing badly this year," Olive observed.

"Oh no, Olive," cried Mrs. Wyndwood. "Didn't we hear at the Archdeacon's yesterday that they were making excellent bags?"

"I meant the birds," said Olive, dryly.

"Bother the birds! I should love to be a sportsman," cried Eleanor, exultantly landing her eleventh perch. They trooped like children to the dinner-bell. "I can see how fascinating it must be. To actually *feel* the struggle for existence; it brings you back to the primitive. You touch reality; you remember you're an animal."

"Lunch always reminds me sufficiently of that," said Olive.

"No," Eleanor argued. "The napery and the flowers come between us and the facts. How glorious it would be to be primitive!" Between Art and Sport—with that charming impressionability of hers—she had drifted as far from the spiritualities of Dolkovitch as, under the Russian's influence, from the Socialism of Gerard Brode.

Herbert, whose skill with the rod was not remarkable, diverged into an account of his stay in a Servian fishing-village which was entirely primitive, "so primitive," he said, laughing, "that the wives do most of the work." He sketched the place with admirable literary touches. "Sheepskin is their only wear," he wound up. "In the winter they wear the wool outside. In the summer they take off their skins and—no, not sit in their bones, as Miss Regan is about to remark—but wear the wool inside."

Matthew was thus led on to relate juvenile sporting experiences on the shores of the Bay of Fundy, and finally his one encounter with a bear in the Cobequid forest, which put the seal on Mrs. Wyndwood's new-born ardor for sport. This tame picking-up of perch palled; they must go mackerel-fishing, she insisted. And so Matthew Strang arranged with a fisherman to go out to sea in his boat next day. But the sea ran high, and to the undisguised relief of Herbert, who felt himself rather cut out by his cousin in these unliterary expeditions, Primitiva arrived the first thing in the morning with a note from Mrs. Wyndwood, saying she had forgotten the lawn-meet at Colonel Chesham's to inaugurate the season of the local pack, and she would ride over to that in the hope of catching sight of a bit of the hunt. There was a postscript from Olive, saying: "And, of course, I must go to chaperon her among all those men." Nevertheless, they went out in the boat late that same afternoon, when the ocean was calm again and quivering in the sun. Their course lay along a track of diamonds which seemed to dance off the water like a million elves of light. By the time they returned, the path of diamonds had changed to one of red gold. Delicious was the ripping sound of the living boat tearing the water, as it dipped gently from side to side, its white sail bellying gracefully. The sunset was strange: one dull red narrow bar crowned by a ball of molten gold radiating four hazy spokes like mill-sails. The ball gradually sank in the sea. In the south the white sickle of the moon grew yellower and yellower; in the east fleecy strips of cloud reflected the dying day. The colors of the cliffs still stood out vivid. The moment was poetic; the air was charged with amorous electricity. The talk drifted into love and marriage.

They played with the subject, skimming it gracefully, touching it with subtle lights, flashed and withdrawn, shooting out audacities with ingenuous impersonality, all four the while tingling with self-consciousness from crown to sole.

Herbert said that to a woman love is a complete romance, to a man a collection of short stories. Olive maintained that the reverse was true. "Oh, if man knew woman!" she cried. "And you who pretend to write comedies!"

Mrs. Wyndwood admitted that Byron was right about love being all in all to a woman. "Nine-tenths of unmarried women," she said, looking at Herbert, "have never had a proposal."

"Nine-tenths of married women more likely," Olive flashed back.

In Matthew's opinion marriage was a failure. Mrs. Wyndwood sadly acquiesced. They sought the remedy.

"Marriage may be a failure, but not friendship," Olive pronounced.

Now it was Matthew's eyes that Eleanor's sought, and his involuntarily met hers. There was exaltation in this secret glance, and mutual reassurance.

"Unless," pursued Olive, "the friendship is contracted between persons of different sex."

Mrs. Wyndwood's eyes drooped; then opened full again to note how Matthew took the addendum. The friends perceived themselves reddening in simultaneous confession that Olive was not so very wrong; an indefinable expression, half abashment, half radiance, flickered over Eleanor's features; her glance, swift, probing, challenging, dazzled him; his whole frame trembled at the thought that this heavenly creature could love him. Then he grew chill again, for she cried, as in the highest spirits:

"Oh, look at the sun! How comic!"

It had, indeed, become a clown's face, swollen and bulbous and crossed with red bars.

The talk went on to Woman's Rights, and Matthew mentioned that he had an indirect relation to the subject, because a girl he used to know in childhood had become Linda Verder's secretary.

"Is she pretty?" Mrs. Wyndwood asked.

"I don't know; I've never seen her."

"But you said you used to know her."

"Oh! you mean Ruth Hailey. She used to be pretty, but my brother tells me she's gone off."

"Haven't you seen her yourself?"

"Oh! not for years."

"I sent Mrs. Verder a subscription some few years ago," said Mrs. Wyndwood, "but I have ceased to believe in Woman's Rights."

"Woman's Rights are a husband and children," said Herbert, with his eye fixed on Olive.

"It is a mistake for the movement to be led by women," pursued Mrs. Wyndwood.

"Oh, was that why you resigned when Lord Boscombe left the Council?" asked Olive, innocently.

Eleanor looked annoyed. "You mean, Mrs. Wyndwood," Matthew hastened to say, "that they lay themselves open to the imputation of being soured spinsters."

"Precisely," she replied. "Besides, they are crying for the moon."

"Or the man in it," muttered Olive.

"No; that's ungenerous to your sisters," said Eleanor.

"Why demand generosity?" Olive retorted. "We are all in the same trade." And she smiled audaciously at Herbert. "Even Mrs. Verder didn't take up with this movement till she lost her husband, and I'll wager this Ruth Bailey is an old maid."

"Ruth Hailey," corrected Matthew, flushing painfully, he scarcely knew why, perhaps from sympathy with the aspersed friend of his childhood. "She *is* unmarried, but I am quite sure it must be from her own choice, for she is very pretty."

"You said she wasn't," said Mrs. Wyndwood, quickly.

He laughed confusedly. "I was thinking of the girl."

The subject dropped.

Ere they got in the wind freshened and Matthew was busy with the sheet. And now a proposition was broached which promised to bring a new sensation into their comparatively sequestered existence. Light-hearted discussions as to what they would do in the event of capsizing through Matthew's mishandling of the sail led to estimates of the distance they could swim in their clothes. Mrs. Wyndwood could not swim at all, and complained of the abrupt shelving of the beach, which gave her only a few feet of splashing room, while Olive was sailing gloriously off in search of the horizon. Herbert

said that, like the man who was asked if he could play the violin, he didn't know if he could swim in his clothes, because he had never tried, and, besides, he had his comedy in his pocket, which was heavy enough to drag down a theatre. Olive said she didn't see that it made any difference whether a lady swam in her clothes or not, especially if she was in evening dress. She claimed that the cap and gown worn in the water were as heavy as men's boating flannels.

The upshot of the discussion was that Miss Regan challenged Mr. Matthew Strang to a race in clothes, which, she insisted, must be new. "You don't go out getting capsized in old clothes," she contended. "Boots you needn't have, nor a coat; people always have time to throw them off—in books. I shall be clothed in a new yachting costume, superficially, of course, to counteract your sheddings from above."

"What waste!" remonstrated Eleanor.

"You who pretend to philanthropy!" mocked Herbert, mimicking her intonation of "You who pretend to write comedies!"

"Waste? To learn to save my life! And don't you see I shall forthwith give away the spoiled costume to a poor creature who would never otherwise have got it?" And Olive, who was quite serious, fell to elaborating a facetious programme of "The Creamery Regatta."

The regatta day duly arrived. Two bathing tents were erected on the beach and decorated with flags. It was arranged that the competitors should swim out leisurely together as far as they cared to go, then turn and race for shore. Herbert was chosen referee; he offered to take them out in a boat and then accompany them back, as a precaution, but Olive laughed at him for an old woman. Eleanor, entering enthusiastically into the fun, had ordered a silver cup from London, and was to present it to the winner.

But the day opened badly, with fitful weather; a gray rain, and thunder and lightning. They waited till the afternoon, when the sun burst out in sudden fire, and in a moment the great stretch of gray cloud was shrivelling off all around it like a burned cobweb. The eager combatants dashed into their

dressing-tents, and, emerging as lightly clad as was compatible with the conditions, they plunged together into the great sapphire sea. Olive's yachting costume turned out to be a pair of knickerbockers and a jacket, rather lighter than her ordinary bathing costume, and Matthew had begged off his waistcoat, and was only hampered by a white flannel shirt and trousers. The outward swim was an ecstasy; the water was warm and sparkling with patches of molten silver breaking up into little shining circles and reuniting; it sent a voluptuous thrill to the palms to cleave its buoyant elasticity, and the forward movement of the body was a rapture. Drawing in the balmy air with joyous breaths, Matthew felt an immense gratitude for existence. There was exhilaration in the mere proximity of Olive, with her lively snatches of conversation. Her lovely flushed face and dripping hair went with him like a mermaiden's. The same thought struck her, for she began to sing jerkily with her beautiful voice snatches of Heine's ballad:

"Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet
Dort oben wunderbar,
Ihr gold'nes Geschmeide blitzet,
Sie kämmt ihr gold'nes Haar."

"Yes, but you haven't got golden hair," the man laughed, joyously.

Farther and farther they swam into the vast shimmering blue, and ecstasy made the pace brisker than they had meditated.

"Shall we start from here?" he asked, at last.

"No, not yet. I want a long race."

They swam on. The brown trawling boats loomed plainer in the offing.

"Here?" said Matthew.

"No—a little farther, faint-heart!"

He turned on his back and propelled himself gently, gazing up in luxurious content at the great circle of blue sky, cloud-mottled round its rim. Olive, lying on her side, paddled lazily a little ahead.

"This is delicious!" she called back. "Clothes make no

difference. But fancy a clothed Lorelei!" And she began to sing again, with pauses for breath:

"Den Schiffer im kleinen Schiffe
Ergreift es mit wildem Weh;
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe,
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh'."

He threw the reply over his head: "You shall lure me no farther." But she mocked him, elated by the glory of motion, and witched him to follow her till the shore was far.

At last they turned, trod water, Olive cried, "One, two, three," and they were off.

For some minutes they swam side by side, Olive making the pace, and Matthew finding it no trouble to keep up with it; at last she made a spurt and shot past him with a triumphant taunt; he allowed her to enjoy some seconds of victory, then came up hand-over-hand and forged ahead. He eased off and she overtook him; he spurted and she flagged; he let her come up again and she came up with a sneer. Resolved to damp her frolicsome spirits, he put on a powerful stroke and showed her a clean pair of heels. She made a desperate effort and drew level with him again. The instinct of victory was now aroused in the painter; he fixed his eyes on the shore and settled steadily to the task of reaching it. Very soon Olive was hopelessly in the rear. He still heard her vague cries from afar. At last they died away entirely. He turned his head to measure the interval. Olive was nowhere to be seen.

His heart contracted with a cold sick horror. He raced back with great side strokes, shouting, "Miss Regan, Miss Regan, holloa!" The great sparkling water stretched all around in deadly silent bareness, suddenly become an evil enemy. He hoped desperately she was only swimming under water for speed or to frighten him.

And then in a moment her head popped up to the right, and he saw from the exhausted expression of the face and the spasmodic struggles of the limbs that she had really gone under. In a few strokes he was at her side. She still retained sufficient self-possession not to grab at him; he supported her with one

hand, then with the rest of his limbs he struck out stoutly for home, she helping him with feeble movements. After an interval of weakness and humility, she recovered somewhat and smiled faintly.

"So you wouldn't follow the Lorelei," she spluttered, reproachfully.

"I am sorry I followed her so far," he said, ruefully regarding the distant shore.

Olive struggled for breath. "Prosaic man! I waited down there for you, but I gave you up and came to the surface again." She essayed sturdier kicks.

"You only sank once?" he said.

"Yes; didn't you hear me calling you to come?"

"I heard sounds, but I thought they were epigrams."

"Brute! To hit a woman when she's down. But I shall be better soon. . . . I hope they can't see us from shore."

"Don't talk! You brought Herbert an opera-glass to see we started fair."

"Nonsense," Olive gasped, indignantly.

"I distinctly remember it."

"How dare you set up your memory against a drowning woman's?"

He was glad to find her like herself, and not alarmed. Her strokes were getting stronger now, but he still feared for the consequences if she should suddenly lose her nerve. "What did you think of when you sank?" he asked, lightly, to make her think the danger of sinking was over.

"Of Her—" she began, and stopped short. "Of her carryings-on at my funeral, poor Nor. I was regretting I hadn't made my will and left her my nose."

This sounded pure nonsense to her companion.

"I think I can go by myself now," she added, after a long silence. "Thank you so much for the use of your arm."

"You are quite sure?" he said, anxiously.

"Yes. Of course, you have won."

He removed his arm, but kept watchfully at her side. And his misgivings were justified, for, after a slow twenty yards, her strokes became so spent and irregular that he came to her

assistance again, and she accepted his support with a wan smile.

"It's this soppy, clogging costume," she said.

"You had better keep your breath in your lungs," he said, not in rebuke, but in hortation.

"I'll inflate myself like an air-balloon," she replied, humbly. "I am so sorry to be such a nuisance." And she turned upon her back and paddled feebly in silence.

He did not answer, for his own nerve was giving way. The responsibility weighed more than the burden, though that was heavy enough with the double weight of superadded garments. He had a spasm of sickening apprehension. His own strokes were getting jerkier; what if he should fail to reach that strip of beach on which he dimly descried two agitated figures! And in this tense, terrible moment the figures were blotted out, he saw only the cliffs in the background and the white sea-gulls overhead, and he was a boy again in the Bay of Fundy, swimming in his clothes for dear life. The illusion was momentary, but it left the memory. A sense of the tragic contrast between the ardent Nova-Scotian lad, dreaming of pictures, and the popular London painter, occupied his consciousness, while his limbs moved automatically shoreward. Then he remembered that of the two who had struck out for home on that memorable day the sailor had only put off the day of drowning. And at the thought that ancient dead face swam up again in front of him. Oh, it was horrible to die, to be dragged down out of the sunlight, to leave a world which held Eleanor Wyndwood! What would become of her? She would live to forget him; she would marry; another man would hold her in his arms. Another man! Oh, direful thought, bitterer than death! There was no need for his death ere another man could possess her. She was only his friend; he had not wanted more than her friendship. Oh, ghastly self-delusion! Olive's sneer at the friendship of the sexes rang in his brain, and that strange intoxicating expression in Eleanor's face — half abashment, half radiance — dispelled the vision of his father's. In a moment of delirium his lips touched her warm cheek; it was her weight that was on his arm. What did it matter if they had a gleam of happiness, he and Eleanor,

both victims of an unsatisfactory world? Was not the great, shining, mocking, remorseless sea waiting to suck him down, indifferent to the aspirations and agonizings of the long years? And then between his lips and hers the dead stony face swam up again, and he turned on his back to escape it, and found unexpected relief in the more reposeful attitude and in the change of arm involved, for the left, which had supported Olive, had grown numb. When, sufficiently rested, he turned again he saw with a thrill of joy that the shore was perceptibly nearer. There were more than two figures now; he made out Primitiva and the old cook. And Herbert's arm was round Mrs. Wyndwood's waist, supporting her. A powerful spurt brought him within clear hearing of Herbert's hail.

"Shall I come out?"

Olive roused herself. "What for?" she sang out, lustily. "The race is decided."

"All right," came the joyous reply. "I was sure Matt could manage it. I wouldn't spoil his chances of a medal."

As they came nearer in he cheered them on with sportive ejaculations, and confounded the beach because there wasn't a single boat within half a mile. When the couple scrambled on shore, shaking themselves like spaniels, Mrs. Wyndwood dragged more heavily on Herbert's sustaining arm, and he saw that she had fainted. Almost at the same instant, by a curious coincidence, the sun, upon which the clouds had gradually been closing in, again disappeared, and the wail of the wind rang wilder round the cliffs.

There was confusion in the household that afternoon. Mrs. Wyndwood soon revived, but had to be put to bed, and Miss Regan, who was secretly grateful for an excitement that kept her from assuming the invalid herself, sat with her. The men hung about the house, anxious, and receiving frequent reassuring bulletins by the lips of Primitiva. Presently those pretty lips brought them an invitation to stay to seven o'clock dinner, when Mrs. Wyndwood would try to come down to present the cup. They need have no delicacy about the larder, for Colonel Chesham had opportunely sent Mrs. Wyndwood a gift of grouse. They galloped over the cliffs to get themselves into their dress-

clothes. Meantime Mrs. Wyndwood had fallen asleep, and at her bedside Olive Regan writhed in a black paroxysm, asking herself why, having once gone down, she had wanted to come up again.

The hostesses were a little late, but the reunion was gay beyond all precedent. The last trappings of ceremony were thrown off. A Bohemian merriment reigned, regardless of the liveried menial who alone sustained the dignity of the dinner-table. Mrs. Wyndwood, looking a shade paler and more spiritual, but no whit less beautiful than her wont, appeared in a low white satin gown, with the same jewelled butterfly poised at the bosom as on the night when Matthew had met her at the Academy soirée. He fancied some occult significance in the circumstance. Olive was in soft green that harmonized so suavely with her complexion as to give her a less aggressive air than when she wore blue. There was a fragrant tea-rose with a sprig of maiden-hair fern at her throat; and the table was gay with many choice specimens of aster and hydrangea, presents from Primitiva's father. Outside the roar of the sea and the wail of the wind emphasized the charm and comfort of the interior and the gladness of being alive.

There was a wavering flush on Mrs. Wyndwood's cheek and a shining moisture in her eye as, before they sat down, she presented Matthew with the cup, which Olive complained had been dashed from her lips. Interrogated as to her sensations, she said she had a horrible feeling of littleness in the midst of the great churn of waters and under the naked sky. It did not seem the same sea she had been bestriding so recklessly and voluptuously. She seemed to herself absolutely unimportant—a mere atom in the blind wash of the waves, a straw they would engulf, drift, or disgorge with equal indifference. It was this thought that suddenly paralyzed her, and made her give up and go under; when she came up, something not herself made her strain every sinew to keep afloat.

"Something not ourselves that makes for life," said Herbert.

She smiled.

"My last thought was of you," she said, audaciously. "I determined to send you a message by submarine cable."

"I had the greatest ado to prevent Primitiva stripping and going out to fetch you in," he rejoined, laughing.

The incidents of the regatta continued to afford amusement from the *hors d'œuvres* to the dessert. At the fish Olive sprang up suddenly and rushed to the window. Her exclamation of "The regatta fireworks!" drew them all after her.

Herbert uttered the long-drawn "Oh!" of the spectators of pyrotechnics. It was, indeed, an extraordinary set-piece, this sunset, in affinity with the fitful tempestuous day—a sky steel-blue again, with great broad sulphur-edged clouds of black smoke; on the upper rim of this smoke, white clouds; towards the horizon, over the inhabited hills, a lovely pale-green light, and on the right of that a monstrous sulphur-cloud, its base hidden below the horizon; the shadow of this brilliant cloud darkening to a purple and crimson beauty on the ever-stirring water, and the cloud itself infiltrating its pores more and more with sulphur and deepening momently to old gold; over the green light, patches of bright gold; the left extremity of the sulphur-cloud coming to meet it in spots of smoky red; every little pool of rain or brine on the beach crimsoning and purpling in responsive radiance.

They returned to their fish, but watched from their seats till the beautiful sulphur-cloud faded into a pale bluish blot. Mrs. Wyndwood, observing it all minutely with her recently acquired artistic vision, said she had never realized before how many editions a sunset went through; she wondered how artists arrested it long enough to paint it. Herbert said sunsets were not fixed but faked. He resumed his badinage of Olive for her failure to see her whole life defile pictorially before her; and she apologized for her forgetfulness on the ground that she hadn't arrived at drowning point. A discussion on memory ensued. Mrs. Wyndwood acknowledged possessing a good verbal memory —especially for poetry. Herbert said that he could only remember ideas, so that he carried away nothing from contemporary literature. Only the Continentals had ideas; the English were a wooden race, "the wooden heads of Old England," he said, derisively; he was glad of his infusion of French blood, there was no salt in English life—nothing but putrefying Puri-

tanism. Olive said, although she was a Celt, she could remember neither ideas nor words. Herbert asked what was her earliest recollection. After screwing up her forehead in earnest effort she replied, honestly, "I forget," and he cried "Bull!" Mrs. Wyndwood proffered her own earliest recollection—of gliding in her mother's arms in a gondola, with a boatman crying *Stali*—and was curious to know Matthew's. He replied mirthfully that he didn't remember, and covered his discomposure with champagne. He could not expose to strangers that memory of his mother scolding his father, shrieking, vociferating, offering to throw up the position, threatening to shoot herself. Even Mrs. Wyndwood would never know that—no one would ever really see the scars on his soul. The thought of her, now babbling harmlessly, saner in her insanity than in her sanity, came up like the skeleton at the feast. He put her resolutely outside with the night and the wind that wailed like a woman. But he heard them moaning: "Oh, the pain of the world!"

After dinner they walked along the shore towards the neighboring village. It blew half a gale now, but the air was not cold and the ladies took only wraps. The quartette looked upon this deserted beach as a private promenade, an appanage of the house. They walked two and two, Matthew and Miss Regan, Herbert and Mrs. Wyndwood. There was only a rim of orange all along the horizon; the rollers thundered on the stones, smashing themselves in flying spray; a fierce undertow kept the waves sandy for half a mile out; there was just light enough to distinguish where the paler green commenced. The darkness grew rapidly as they walked; the last faint reflection of sunset faded on the gray sea. An unusual silence possessed them after the exuberance of the evening. They stopped now and again to shake the little pebbles out of their shoes. All was black when they reached the village. The beach was full of wickerwork crab-pots, and the headless divided forms of skate and dog-fish loomed uncannily from the poles on which they hung. They were the crab-fishers' bait. Only a stray mongrel represented the village, which already slept. The sea was mournful and gloomy; its pitchy blackness, over which the sky hinged like a half-raised gray lid, was relieved only by its own broken lines

of foam, which sometimes rolled in six deep, looking exactly like streaks of phosphorescence on a dark wall, and adding weirdness to the forlorn desolation of the scene. There was no other line of light either on sea or land; the lonesome sea tossed sleeplessly in its agony, howling and crying.

They turned back, interchanging companions. During the walk Mrs. Wyndwood suddenly asked Matthew if his wife knew where he was: he said, "No"; sometimes his brother Billy did; Billy lived with her: his man forwarded all letters from his studio. After a long pause he added that practically he had been separated from his wife for years. Eleanor murmured again, "Poor woman," and he was too shame-stricken to look her in the face, and to read that the sympathy was for him. They relapsed into silence, and indeed conversation was difficult.

The night had grown wilder, the wind blew more fiercely, drenching their faces with salt spray, whirling them round and round and almost lifting them off their feet. But the clouds were driven off and the star-sprinkled heaven was revealed, majestic.

Near the house Mrs. Wyndwood and Matthew Strang stopped to admire the sublime spectacle, sheltering themselves from the gale in a niche in the cliff; the other two had already gone round the craggy projection which hid the house.

They watched the mad cavalry charge of creaming billows; watched them break, thundering and throwing their spray heavenwards like a continuous play of white fountains all along the line of march. To the right, beyond the village whence they had come, where the cliff jutted out at its lowest level, a ghostly fountain leaped again and again sheer over the top of the cliff with a crashing and splashing that was succeeded by the long-receding moan of the back-drawn wave soughing through the rattling pebbles.

Her face, flushed with the passion of the storm, showed divinely in the dim starlight; beneath her wrap her bosom, panting from the walk in the teeth of the wind, heaved with excitement; the gale had dishevelled her hair. They scarcely spoke; the organ-roll of the sea crashed majestically like the bass in some savage symphony of the winds.

Now at last the moon leaped out, framed in a weird cloud-rack; the moonlight played on her loveliness and made it wonderful.

She moved slightly forward. "The cliff is too damp to lean upon," she murmured.

Audaciously he slipped a trembling arm against the rock and let her form rest against that. She scarcely seemed conscious of him; she was watching the rampant, seething waters, volleying their white jets skyward with a crash of cannon that outroared the wind; her scarlet lips were parted eagerly; the dreamy light had gone from her eyes; they flashed fire.

"Oh, I could dare to-night!" she cried.

The wind blew her tresses into his face; the perfume of them stung his blood. Her loveliness was maddening him. So close! so close! Oh, to shower mad kisses upon her lips, her eyes, her hair! What did it matter, there on that wild beach alone with the elements! He had been so near death; who would have recked if he had been dead now, tossed in that welter of waters?

The waves broke with a thousand thunders, the white fountains flew at the stars; they seemed alive, exultant, frenzied with the ecstasy of glorious living. Oh, for life—simple, sublime—the keen, tingling, savage life of Vikings and sea-robbers in the days before civilization, in the full-blooded days when men loved and hated fiercely, strenuously, wrenching through rapine and slaughter the women they coveted. Ah, surely he had some of their blood; it ran in his veins like fire; he was of their race, despite his dreamings. He was his father's son, loving the storm and the battle.

The wind wailed; it was like the cry of his tortured heart, his yearning for happiness. It rose higher and higher. A bat flew between them and the moon. Eleanor nestled to him involuntarily; her face was very near to his. It gleamed seductively; there was no abashment, only alluring loveliness; the fire in her eyes kindled him now not to the secondary life of Art, but to the primary life of realities. Could she not hear his heart beat? Yes, surely the storm of the elements had passed into her blood, too. Her face was ardent, ecstatic. His arm held her tight. Oh, to stake the world on a kiss!

The moon was hidden again; they were alone in the mad, dim night; the complexities of Society were far away. They looked at each other, and through her eyes he seemed to see heaven.

A star fell overhead. It drew her eyes away a moment to watch its fiery curve. He felt the spell was broken. The wind shrieked with an eldritch cry, like the mocking threnody of his thwarted hope. He had a shuddering remembrance of Mad Peggy. And straightway he saw her weird figure dashing round the crag in the darkness—a shawl over her head, and a lovely face, at once radiant and frenzied, gleaming from between its dusky folds. His heart almost stopped, a superstitious thrill froze his hot blood. Never to be happy! Ah, God! never! never! To thirst and thirst, and nothing ever to quench his thirst!

Mrs. Wyndwood started forward. "Oh, there you are, Olive!"

The figure threw passionate arms round her. "Comfort me, darling; I am engaged."

For the happier Herbert had spoken. And Olive had listened shyly, humbly, with tears, full of an exquisite uplifting emotion, akin to the exaltation of righteousness, at the thought of giving herself to this man, of living her life with and for the one true soul in the world.

They stood close to the hoary rim of the black welter; dusky figures, wind-rocked and spray-drenched, a little apart from each other, the shining house in the background.

"And when did you begin to think of me—in that way?" she faltered.

"I never thought of you in any other. But that night when Matthew arrived, when you sat nid-nodding in the grandfather's chair, you maddened me; you were adorable! the contrast was exquisite. To think of you — a wilful little misanthrope — to think of that glorious, wayward creature fading away till she suited the chair. Oh, it was too—"

He broke off. Passion robbed him of words. He moved nearer—she drew back.

"Oh, but will you still"— she hesitated, shy of the word— "love me when I do suit the chair?"

"I shall always see you as you were then."

She laughed with a half-sob.

"And just then," she confessed deliciously, fluttering even now like a bird in the net, "I was beginning to get frightened of you. I felt you growing upon me, shadowing the horizon like the roc in the *Arabian Nights*. And the pain of the world was outside—in the great black night—calling to me in my slough of luxury."

"You witch! Veil those eyes or I shall kiss them."

She retreated.

"And why were you frightened of me?" he asked, tenderly.

She said, humbly, in little shy jerks: "I felt like in the sea this morning—one little atom, and the whole world against me, and my own weakness most of all. . . . I had prided myself on my swimming, and here was I being dragged under . . . just like other girls . . . a victim to the same ridiculous passion."

"You delightful, candid creature! With me as the object?"

"Don't be flippant now, Herbert." How delicious his name sounded; it made amends for the rebuke! "You do understand me. Marriage is a second birth — voluntary, this time. It means accepting the universe, which was thrust upon one unasked."

"It means making the best of it."

"Oh, surely it means more. It means passing it on to others. But I surrender. I cannot live without you."

"Olive!"

He sprang to take her, but she eluded him. "Look! the moon is covered up again."

"I only want to see your face."

"Don't talk like other men, though I have fallen like other girls."

"No, you are always yourself, Olive—I have dreamed of this moment. I would not have it otherwise—except perhaps with you in the grandfather's chair and a poke bonnet."

"Now you are *your*self. This is such a conventional ending

to a holiday, we must preserve what originality we can." She was recovering her spirits.

"A conventional ending! Why, it's a most romantic incongruous match. It beats the comedy. I shall burn it."

"No, let's produce it—it wouldn't cost much."

"I am not worthy of you, Olive," he said, with a quiver in his voice. "I have nothing."

"Oh! When you have my heart!"

"My queen of girls! But what of your relatives?"

A gleam of fun passed across her wet face. She had her droll look of mischief.

"You are all of them. I was of age long ago—I am awfully old, you know—you take me with your eyes open—"

"I can't; yours dazzle me."

"That 'll do for the comedy," she laughed, gleefully. "Still, if you do want me, there are only you and I to consider."

"Only we two," he murmured.

"We two," she repeated, and her eyes were suffused with tender moisture.

There was a delicious silence. He tried to take her hand. This time she abandoned it to him; a wave of moral emotion lifted her to the stars.

The wind wailed, the black sea crashed white at their feet, its whirling brine blinded their eyes as with salt tears.

"Isn't it curious?" she said, as they moved back a little, hand in hand.

"What, dearest?"

"That you and I should be made happier by our common perception of the unhappiness of life?"

"Queer girl!" he thought. But he only squeezed her hand.

"The Catechism is right," she went on, thoughtfully, proceeding to misquote it. "The waves are too strong. It's no use fighting against your sex or your station. Do your duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call you. But I would have that text taught to the rich exclusively, not to the poor. The poor should be encouraged to ascend; the rich should be taught contentment. Else their strength for good is wasted fruitlessly." And the electric current of love generated

by those close-pressed palms flashed to her soul the mission of a life of noble work hand in hand.

Herbert scarcely heard her. The glow of her lovely face, the flashes of feeling that passed over it, the tears that glistened on her eyelashes—these absorbed his senses. Her generalizations were only a vague, exquisite music. He lifted her hand and held it passionately to his lips. She murmured, beseechingly:

"You will never disappoint me, Herbert?"

"My darling!" And he strove to draw her nearer and press his first kiss upon those bewitching lips.

"Oh! there's a star falling," she cried, and slipped from his hold, a beautiful Diana, virgin as the white spray and tameless as the night.

She had disappointed Herbert. He was puzzled. But as she disappeared round the cliff in quest of the others, a smile of triumphant content curled round his boyish lips.

"That's the last touch of piquancy," he murmured, as he chased her round the crag.

CHAPTER VIII

ELEANOR WYNDWOOD

Two days after Herbert's engagement, Matthew Strang left Devonshire on the plea of a death in the family.

A letter from Billy had indeed brought the news that Rosina's father was no more. Matthew had never thought untenderly of old Coble; the mountain of a man had acted generously after his lights, and now that his genial roar had passed into the eternal silence, the pathos of death softened his son-in-law towards his memory and towards the bereaved daughter. Nevertheless, Matthew's plea was only a pretext. He had no intention of intruding upon Rosina. After her recent reception of him he had no reason to suppose a visit would be welcome. The letter from Billy had included no message from her, except a request, superfluously and irritatingly formal, that she should be allowed

to give house-room to her aunt Clara, who had gone to live with old Coble when his daughter married. His reply to Billy contained warmly sympathetic reference to the loss of old Coble, and expressed his joy at the prospect of receiving Miss Coble.

His real reason for fleeing from Devonshire was his discovery of his real feeling towards Mrs. Wyndwood. When the frenzy of the stormy night had merged in the sober reflections of the mild morning, he shuddered to think how near he had gone to forfeiting her respect, to insulting her by the revelation of a dishonorable passion. To continue in her daily society would have been too great a torment, aggravated, as it must have been, by the sight of Herbert's happiness. Perhaps the rude reminder of his domestic shackles contained in Billy's letter strengthened his resolve to tear himself away. Courtesy compelled him to leave behind him an invitation to the ladies to take tea one day at his studio, which neither had ever seen. How could he snap abruptly the links he had forged with this delightful twain?

He threw himself with ardor into work, trying to soothe his pain by expressing it in Art, as a woman sheds it away in tears. He toiled at a symbolic picture to illustrate Rossetti's sonnet, "Love's Fatality."

"Love shackled with Vain-longing, hand to hand."

He put the figures in a vague landscape, but did not study his models in the open, for he now had a desire to produce that fatness of effect suggested by a concentrated studio light instead of the dry flatness which the open air always diffused. He no longer pinned himself to technical theories, finding by experience that he only invented them afterwards to justify the procedure his instinct dictated for any particular picture. But his progress with "Love's Fatality" was slow and unsatisfactory. He was feeling about, as it were, for a new manner worthy of her who inspired it. He wrote her once telling her that it was on the easel, and reminding her and Miss Regan of their promise to visit him on their return from Devonshire, and he had from her an answer—elegantly indited on dainty, crested paper, delicately scented—which he held often to his lips with a rankling, gnawing pain of unsatisfied and unspoken desire.

She wrote that she was very anxious to see the picture, and also to be back in town, for she was weary of the country with its monotony, its lack of the complex thrill of civilization. Not that the town held much to enthral her. Fortunately Olive had consented to the Paris project; the girl did not want to marry before next summer, and rather hailed the idea of a farewell quasi-bachelor Bohemian period of art and liberty. What she, Eleanor, would do when she lost Olive Heaven only knew. And then came the wail of world-weariness which his ear had caught already in the first stages of their acquaintanceship. He interpreted it in the light of his own blank unrest, but to imagine her hungering for him as he hungered for her was impossible to his reverent passion. That she admired and liked him he could not doubt; and in one or two instants of mutual electricity he had dared to think that Herbert was right, and that she loved him. But his diffidence could never cherish the hope for more than a few seconds; and even if she indeed loved him, he felt that her delicacy, her finer, more ethereal ethical sense would preserve her from the wistful images that tortured him. It was the memory of her unhappy marriage to which her sadness must be due; no doubt, too, her life lacked love, though she might not be consciously aware of it.

When she at last came to see the picture, he was startled to find her alone, and the bearer of a message of apology from Miss Regan. His studio being, so to speak, a place of business, he was not unused to receive ladies in connection with commissions, but his poor, agonized heart—that had so ached to see her again—pulsed furiously with mad hope as her stately figure, clad in widow-like black that set off her beauty in novel lights, moved slowly about the great studio, admiring pictures which he would have hidden from her in the days when he thought of her more as a spiritual critic than a woman. Now, even though she stood before him making remarks, he was too distraught to catch the purport of her criticisms. He followed her about in a haze, a dream, speaking, replying, and feeling all the while as if it was all part of a game of make-believe, and in a moment the thin pretence would be thrown off and she would be in his arms. But the moments passed, the haze cleared, and

he realized that he was entertaining a fashionable, self-possessed lady, wrapped up in artistic interest, with no apparent relation to the woman who had flushed with the passion of the sea and the winds on that night of stress and storm.

His mind flew back from her bodily presence to picture her leaning against his arm, and the memoried vision seemed incredible. She was unapproachably demure in her black-silk gown. Over the shoulders she wore a short black-velvet cape embroidered in jet, with a beaded fringe, finished off with a filmy black lace reaching just below the waist. When she threw it back, Matt saw the great puff sleeves of her gown and a turned-down collar that combined with them to give an old-world feeling. At her throat was a soft ruche of black chiffon. And from this monotone of black the blond skin of the throat and face rose dazzling, crowned by a small pink bonnet, of shamrock shape, entirely composed of roses, with a lace-and-jet butterfly fluttering over it. Now and then she pointed out something with a long black-gloved forefinger. Her left hand held a dainty little book, that looked—like herself—poetry. How far away she seemed, standing thus at his side! He was in a fever of chills and heats.

She stopped longest before his unfinished picture of "Love's Fatality." He heard her approving his conception of

"Love shackled with Vain-longing, hand to hand,"

but, even as her ravishing lips spoke golden words of praise, his vain longing to kiss them admonished him how feebly his symbols expressed the heart-sickness he was feeling. The longer he heard the music of her lauding voice, the more those gray eyes kindled below the pink bonnet in adoration of his genius, the more his disgust with the picture grew; and when a chance word of hers reminded him that the subject had already been treated in the last Academy, he determined to destroy his work the moment she was gone, though he had always been aware of the little skied picture which had drawn Miss Regan's eccentric attention. The last vestiges of his hope of her love died as she discussed "Love's Fatality," with apparent unconsciousness that to him, at least, the picture stood for something personal; her

aloofness was exacerbating. The heats of his fever died; only the chill was left.

He gave her some tea, and became gradually aware that she was abnormally loquacious and vivacious. He remembered to ask after Miss Regan's health, and was told that Olive was bright and gay, with only rare reactions of pessimism. Mrs. Wyndwood wondered dolefully again what she would do when Olive was married. His heart, bolder than his lips, beat "Come to me. Come to me." But she did not seem to catch its appeal, though his eyes spoke, too. In his embarrassment he turned over the pages of the dainty little book she had laid down on the table. He started at finding it a new volume of Harold Lavender's poems, and when on the fly-leaf he read "To Eleanor" his face twitched noticeably.

"Ah, that was the book Mr. Lavender wrote about in the letter that Primitiva lost," she said, quickly. "It's just out to-day."

"I see he calls you Eleanor," he observed, tonelessly.

"Yes," she responded, smiling, "that is a poetic license. Besides, it is a screen. There are so many Eleanors."

That sounded true to his bitter mood. There were indeed so many Eleanors, all in contradiction. He kept turning over the leaves in silent jealousy.

"Ah, that is a very pretty one you have there," she said, lightly. "It might suggest a subject to you. Read it aloud, it's only ten lines."

Fuming inwardly at the suggestion that the dapper poet of sugar-plums and the hero of the nougat, whom he mentally classed with Roy as an interloper, could afford him any inspiration, and further incensed by the command to read the fellow's verses, he gabbled through the little poem, which extended over two deckle-edged, rough, creamy pages.

"ROSALIND READING AN OLD ROMANCE

"I watch her dainty rose-bud mouth,
That trembles with the exquisite
And wondrous tide that steals from it
Of song, redolent of the South;

While o'er her April countenance,
The music of the quaint romance,
The sweeter for a sense of pain,
Sends sun and shade; and lost in dream,
Her sweet eyes softly flash and gleam
With golden smiles and diamond rain."

"I hope she read it better than that," laughed Mrs. Wyndwood, mirthfully.

"Well, she couldn't make the fourth line scan anyhow," he said.

"Oh, you mean 'redolent.' That's another poetic license."

"And Rosalind seems to be another," he said, surlily.

"Oh no, I'm not Rosalind. I haven't a dainty rose-bud mouth. Mine is a full-grown rose at least." And her laugh showed the white teeth gleaming against the red lips.

Her arch laughing face so close to his across the little tea-table tantalized him intolerably.

"It is a red, red rose," he whispered, hoarsely, half rising and bending over as if to survey it.

"Beware of the thorn!" she laughed, nervously, drawing back involuntarily. "And to think that but for the coast-guard who found Primitiva's letter," she rattled on hastily, "some other fair lady would have had the honor of the dedication."

"One of the other Eleanors, perhaps," he said, sulkily, sinking back into his chair.

"Poor Primitiva!" she cried, in unabated hilariousness and intensified volubility. "Oh, she's been such fun. You know Olive has brought her to London. She begged her away from her father, to the excessive joy of Primitiva, who has become her devoted slave. The other night Olive took her to the theatre with us and would have her in the box. She had been wrought up to a wild excitement, and when she got inside the theatre and looked round at the festive company she drew a deep breath of rapture. She said she liked it very much. Long before the orchestra struck up, Olive discovered that Primitiva imagined she was already in complete enjoyment of the play, and that to sit in the theatre was all in all. Only one thing marred Primitiva's pleasure. She was looking round furtively

for your cousin, and at last asked where Mr. Herbert sat; not, it transpired, because of his position as Olive's *fiancé*, but because she had heard us talk of Herbert as writing a play, and imagined he was an inseparable adjunct of the theatre. Of course, she doesn't know even now that there are more theatres than one. When the overture struck up she was surprised and delighted by this unexpected addition to the pleasures of the evening. The rising of the curtain was the climax of her astonishment and her transport. The action of the piece—a melodrama, purposely chosen for her behoof by our sportive friend, experimenting upon her freshness—seized her from the start, and kept her riveted. The fall of the first curtain, and the arrest of the innocent man for the murder, left her weeping bitterly. 'It isn't real, you little goose!' Olive said, to pacify her. 'Isn't it?' Primitiva replied, opening her brimming trustful eyes to their widest. She gave a little sobbing laugh. 'And I thought they was all alive!' Then she rose to go, and was astonished to hear that there was more. Alas! it would have been better had she gone. When the hero's wife, visiting the hero in prison, kissed him, Primitiva inquired if the actor and actress were really married, and learning that they were not, was too disgusted to sympathize any further with their misfortunes. It revolted her," concluded Mrs. Wyndwood, taking up her teacup with an air of preparing for the resumption of sips, "that a man who was not a woman's husband should kiss her." And her face gleamed more tantalizing than ever under the roses of her bonnet.

His fingers dented the teaspoon they fidgeted with; it seemed intolerable that his life should be spoiled by acceptance of the moral stand-point of this simple creature. He with his artistic agonies and his complex sorrows and his high imaginings to be squeezed into the same moral moulds as Primitiva! He refused to see the humor of her. The girl had no more interest for him than that irritating Roy. It was maddening to have Eleanor sitting there in cold blood, the Honorable Mrs. Wyndwood, an irreproachable widow in black, talking abstractly of kisses. Then the tense string of expectation snapped; the apathy that he felt in the presence of Rosina invaded him—he stirred his

tea listlessly, awaiting the moment of her departure. As she talked on, loquacious to the end, prattling of Erle-Smith and Beethoven, and Swinburne, his apathy quickened into impatience; he longed for her to be gone. His hidden fingers played a tattoo on the side of his chair. She bade him good-bye at last; she would not see him again for many months, unless he came to Paris.

"I always run over to do the Salon," he answered, indifferently.

When he had seen her, stately and stiff, to her carriage, and his studio-door had shut him in again, he ripped up the canvas with his old sailor's knife in a paroxysm of fury. His eye caught the silver regatta cup standing proudly upon the piano. He felt like dashing it down; then it occurred to him how fine and bitter a revenge it would be upon her and humanity at large to fill it with poison and drain it to the dregs. But he only threw himself upon a couch in a passion of sobs, such as had not shaken him since childhood. The great picturesque room, which the autumn twilight had draped in dusk, was ineffably dreary without her; his heart seemed full of dust, and tears were a blessed relief in the drought. They probably saved him from ending his empty life there and then.

He rallied, and began other pictures, but he could do nothing with them. He refused commissions for portraits, hating the imposition of subject, and fearful of exposing his restlessness to a stranger's gaze. The return of the world to town renewed social solicitations, but he felt he was wearing his heart on his sleeve, and declined to parade it through drawing-rooms. Despite this gain of time, the weeks passed without any definite product. He was searching, but he could not find. One day he would sit down and fix in charcoal some rough suggestions for a greater symbolic picture than that which he had destroyed; but the next day he would be working up his recollections of Devonshire night-scenery, trying by a series of tentative touches on a toned canvas to evolve the romantic mystery of those illumined villages niched in the cliffs, or of the moon making a lovely rippling path across the dark lonely sea, as Eleanor had made across his life; while a day or so after he would discard

these thinly painted shadowy night-pieces, and, painting straight from the shoulder, "impasto" his canvas with brutal blobs of paint that at a distance merged into the living flow of red sunlit water.

And always this rankling, gnawing pain of unsatisfied and unspoken desire. No man could work with that at his breast. And her rare letters did not allay it, though they spoke no word of love, but were full of enthusiasm for the free student life in Paris, the glorious *camaraderie*, the fun of dining occasionally for a few centimes in tiny *crémeries*, and going to the People's Theatre off the Boulevard Montparnasse, where they gave a bonus of *cerises à l'eau de vie* between the pieces. Oh, if she had only been younger, less staled by life! If she could only begin over again. If she only had the energy of Olive, who started work at the Academy at the preternatural hour of eight A.M. But she had lost the faculty of beginnings, she feared, and she made but poor progress in sculpture. That was the undercurrent of these gay letters, the characteristic note of despondency.

Rosina held out no hand of reconciliation. His only contact with her was through Billy, who paid him one visit to escort "Aunt Clara" over the studio. His wife had, it transpired, held forth so copiously and continuously upon its glories that the poor creature had plucked up courage to ask to see it, and Rosina, who had evidently concealed the breach with her famous husband, had besought Billy to convoy her. And so one day these two routed out the sick lion from the recesses of his den.

The appearance of Miss Clara Coble was as much a shock as a surprise to Matthew Strang. In the nine years or so since she had assisted at his wedding—an unimportant but not disagreeable personage, tall and full-blooded as her brother, she had decayed lamentably. She was now an ungainly old maid, stooping and hollow-eyed, with crows' feet and sharpened features. She had a nervous twitch of the eyelids, her head drooped oddly, and her conversation was at times inconsecutive to the verge of fatuity. From the day of her birth to the day of his death Coble had thought of her as his little sister, and he never real-

ized the tragedy of her spinsterhood, of her starved nature, though under his very eye she had peaked and pined in body and soul.

But it leaped to the painter's eye at the first sight of her, and her image remained in his brain, infinitely pathetic.

The ugliness that in earlier days would have averted his eyes in artistic disgust, drew him now in human pity. He grew tenderer to Rosina at the thought that she was harboring this wreck of femininity. It rejoiced him to think how much "Aunt Clara" was enjoying this visit to his grandeurs; he listened with pleased tolerance to her artless babble—in her best days she had always had something of her brother's big simplicity—as she told tale after tale out of school, repeating the colossal things her poor brother had said about his son-in-law's genius and wealth, recounting how Coble had thus become the indirect hero of the Temperance Bar, and unconsciously revealing—what was more surprising to the painter—the pride with which Rosina had always written home (and still spoke to her aunt) about her husband and his fashionable friends and successes. And poor Miss Coble expanded in the atmosphere of the great man, which she had never hoped to breathe. Her cadaverous cheek took a flush, she held her head straighter on her shoulders. He felt that, after all, it was worth while being famous if he could give such pleasure to simple souls by his mere proximity. The fame he had sold his body and soul for was a joyless possession; happy for him if it could yet give joy to others.

Billy told him that Ruth Hailey was in Paris at the Hotel Windsor with Mrs. Verder, preparatory to the long Antipodean tour, and suggested that he might call upon her when he went over to see the Salon if she was still there. Matthew wrote down the address, but said he didn't think he should go over that year. Billy looked disappointed; he had been about to suggest accompanying his brother. Life at Camden Town, he intimated fretfully, had resumed its dead-alive routine, and he glanced towards Miss Coble as if to imply that her advent had not brightened the domestic table.

When the visitors left, Matthew put them into a cab and drove with them a little way to purchase presents for the children.

There was a doll for Clara and a box of animals for Davie. To Rosina he did not venture to send even a message. At a word from her he would have gone to her, but he had no stomach to cope with her tantrums.

This new reminder of home left him more depressed than before. It was impossible to concentrate himself upon his work, even in the presence of models. They were an unprofitable expense, and he dismissed them and brooded over the ruins of his life. Without Eleanor Art was impossible, he felt. True Art he could not produce without her inspiration, and false Art was falseness to her and a vile slavery.

Insomnia dogged his nights, and when he slept it was but to suffer under harassing dreams fantastically compounded of his early struggles. These dreams never touched his later life; many of them dealt oppressively with the bird-shop, and he had often to clean endless shades with chamois leather, smashing one after the other under the rebuking but agonizingly unintelligible "Pop! Pop! Pop!" of "Ole Hey," though he felt sure Tommy, the young Micmac errand-boy, had cracked them beforehand. And what added to the sleeper's agony was that these breakages would have to be made good to the Deacon from his scanty wage, or, worse, he would be discharged and unable to send the monthly subsidy to Cobequid Village. The anguish and anxiety were quite as harassing as though the troubles were real.

He made one desperate excursion into Society—it was the delightful dinner-party of a gifted fellow-artist whose cultured and beautiful wife had always seemed to him the ideal hostess. And a pretty and guileless girl, full of enthusiasm for Art and Nature and the life that was opening out before her, fell to his escorting arm; she was visibly overpowered by her luck and charmingly deferential; at first his responsive smile was bitter, but his mood lightened under her engaging freshness and the champagne he imbibed recklessly.

But the next morning's reaction, aggravated by the headache of indigestion, plunged him into more tenebrous glooms. But for the unkindly fates he might have sat with such a wife, host and hostess of such a gathering. He pictured Eleanor receiv-

ing his guests, and in his factitious happiness he gathered the poor and the despised to his hearth. The images of suicide resurged. He saw it on the bills:—"Suicide of a Popular Painter." Why not? The position was hopeless; were it not best to throw it up? How the world would stare! No one would understand the reason. Rosina would still remain unknown, irrelevant to the situation. And his eyes filled with tears, in the bitter luxury of woe.

But he did not commit suicide, and all that the world, or that minute portion of it which talks Art, wondered at, was why Matthew Strang was unrepresented when the Academy opened in May. It leaked out that he had been ill, and there were sympathetic paragraphs which were not altogether misinformed, for these sleepless or dream-tortured nights had brought on nervous prostration and acute headaches. That ancient blood-poisoning, too, had left its traces in his system, and when he was worried and overwrought his body had to pay again the penalty of unforgiven physical error.

Again, as in those far-off days, he thought of a sea-voyage to his native village; it dwindled down to crossing the Channel. As the opening of the Salon drew nearer and nearer, he felt more and more strongly that he must not miss the Exhibition. It was part of a painter's education. There was no need to see Eleanor Wyndwood; by remaining on the fashionable side of the river the chances were he would not even come across her casually in the few days of his stay. No, there was nothing to apprehend. And besides, it began to be increasingly borne in upon him that it was his duty to look up Ruth Hailey; she had called upon him at Camden Town, and etiquette demanded that he should return the call. What had she and Rosina talked about? he wondered dully. If he did not go soon, she might be off to Australia, and the opportunity of seeing his ancient playmate would probably recur nevermore.

And so a bright May morning saw him arrive in the capital of Art, breakfast hastily at the Grand Hotel, and—drive straight to the Latin Quarter. Other climes, other thoughts, and the gayety of the Boulevards, with their green trees and many-colored kiosks, had begun to steal into his spirit, and his gloomy

apprehension of danger to dissipate in the crisp sunny air. Why should he not see Eleanor Wyndwood?

And then he discovered that he did not know her address, that she wrote from the English Ladies' Art Club; he hunted out the place, but the concierge told him she was not there, and gave him the address of the Academy most of the ladies attended, but this was the hour of *déjeuner*, and monsieur would probably not find them there till the afternoon. He grew downcast again, and, dismissing the cab, he sauntered on foot towards the Academy, trying to kill time. He dropped into a tiny restaurant close by to get a cup of coffee; it was decorated by studies from the nude, evidently accepted in payment for dinners; and the ceiling had a central decoration that reminded him of his own crude workmanship in the sitting-room of that hotel in New Brunswick. He sat down at a little table facing the only lady customer, a dashing Frenchwoman, the warm coloring of whose handsome model's face showed between a great black-plumed hat and a light-blue bow, and who paused between her spoonfuls of apple-stew to chant joyously, "Coucou, coucou, fal la, la, la, la." A decadent poet with a leonine name sipped absinthe, a spectacled Dane held forth intermittently on the bad faith of England towards Denmark at the commencement of the century, a Scotch painter discoursed on fly-fishing, and exhibited a box of trout-flies, and one or another paused from time to time to hum, "Coucou, coucou, fal la, la, la, la," in sympathy with the gay refrain. Hens fluttered and clucked about the two sunlit tables, and goat wandered around, willing to eat.

Matthew Strang fed the hens and was taken by the humors of the quarter, into which he had scarcely penetrated before, knowing mainly the other side of the water. Perceiving him looking at her pictures, the stout smiling proprietress, whose homely face, minus her characteristic smile, flared in paint on a wall, protruding from a scarlet-striped bodice, asked him in very loud tones if he would like to see her collection, and straightway haled him up-stairs to her salon, which was hung thickly with meritorious pictures, upon whose beauties she held a running comment, astonishing Matthew by the intelligence of

her criticisms. "This represents a hawthorn, monsieur, which blossoms in the spring. This was done by a Dane who is dead. The King of Denmark offered him a commission, but he would not work for him, because he was a revolutionary—in painting only, you understand, an Impressionist. That is a copy of the one in the Luxembourg. I paid two hundred francs to have it made, because I love the original so. Oh yes, it is a very good copy. My landlord offered me four hundred for it, but I prefer to live in a little apartment, surrounded by my pictures. As you say, I am an amateur of pictures. There are more here in my bedroom," and she ushered him in, apologizing for the bed not being made. Then she told him her history. She was a widow with an only son, who was *beau garçon.* Ah, she was beautiful herself when she had twenty years. Her son was to be an artist. Matthew Strang feelingly hoped the boy would become a great artist; inwardly he wondered wistfully why he himself had not been blessed with an art-loving mother. And then in a curious flash of retrospective insight he recognized for the first time the essential artistic elements in his mother's character, stifled by a narrow creed—her craving for the life of gay cities, her Pagan anger at Abner Preep's bow-legs! What a pity she had not been born in this freer artistic atmosphere, which indeed her ancestors must have breathed, though their blood had been crossed with German and Scotch, as if to produce his own contradictory temperament. In London, he thought, artistic connoisseurship was the last thing one would look for in small shopkeepers. In a softer mood he repaired to the Academy, which was entered through a pair of large folding doors that gave upon a stone corridor. He passed through this passage and came out under a sloping porch, with broken trellis-work at one side and an untidy tree. At the top of a flight of stone steps that descended thence, he was stopped by a block of young American fellows in soft felt hats, who motioned him to stand still, and, to his astonishment and somewhat melancholy amusement, he found himself part of a group about to be photographed by a pretty young lady student in the sunny, dusty court-yard below.

The group she had posed stretched all down the steps, and

consisted mainly of models — male and female. There were Italian women, dusky and smiling, some bareheaded, some hooded, and a few pressing infants—literal olive-branches—to their bosoms. There was an Italian girl of fourteen with a mustache, who was a flare of color in her green velvet apron and gorgeous trailing head-dress. There were Frenchwomen with coquettish straw hats, and a child in a Tam o' Shanter; there was a Corsican in a slouch-hat, with coal-black hair and a velvet jacket to match, and a little Spanish boy in a white hat. Thrown in as by way of artistic contrast with all this efflorescence of youth was a doddering, pathetic old man with a spreading gray beard and flowing gray locks; and there were young lady students of divers nationalities—Polish, Greek, Dutch, and American—curiously interspersed in the motley group which stretched right down the stone steps between the stone balustrades that terminated in stone urns spouting disorderly twigs. Behind the pretty photographer were the terra-cotta walls of the sculpture atelier, which, high beyond her head, were replaced by long, green-glazed windows, into which a pink lilac-bush, tiptoeing, tried to peep; around her were stools, dumb-bells, damaged busts, a headless terra-cotta angel with gaping trunk and iron stump, nursing a squash-faced cherub, and dismantled packing-cases swarming with sportive black kittens; and facing her a great blackened stone head of Medusa stared from a red-brick pedestal, awful with spiders' webs across the mouth and athwart the hollow orbits and in the snaky hair covered with green moss; and towering over her head and dominating the court-yard stood a colossal classical statue, tarnished and mutilated, representing a huge helmeted hero, broken-nosed and bleared, sustaining a heroine, as armless but not so beautiful as the Venus de Milo, doing a backward fall. But the sun shone on the dusty litter and the mess and the lumber, and the lilac-bush blossomed beautifully, and over all was the joy of youth and Art and the gayety of the spring. Matthew Strang felt an ancient thrill pass through his sluggish veins. To be young and to paint—what happiness! His eyes moistened in sympathy with the scene. The models were redolent of Art—the very children breathed Art, the babes sucked it in. Art

was a republic, and everybody was equal in it—the doughtiest professor and the meanest model, the richest amateur and the penurious youth starving himself to be there. There was nothing in the world but Art — it was the essence of existence. There were people who lived for other things, but they did not count. Oh, the free brave life! He was glad to be photographed as part and parcel of all this fresh aspiration; it revivified him; he had a superstitious sense that it was symbolic.

The group scattered, dismissed by the "Merci" of the pretty photographer; and Matthew, descending the steps, asked her if Mrs. Wyndwood worked in her atelier. She did not know, but she guessed from his description it must be the aristocratic-looking lady who had dropped in once or twice in Miss Regan's company. Miss Regan came regularly every morning at eight o'clock, but not at all in the afternoon, when she worked at home. Miss Regan's own studio was in an Impasse about ten minutes away; probably her friend lived with her. Heartily thanking his informant, he betook himself thither. He found the Impasse in a prosaic, grimy street, amid which the charming, if battered bass-relief of Venus with Cupids over its entrance, struck an unexpected note of poetry, which was intensified by the little Ionic portico with classic bronze figures between its pillars that faced him as he passed through the corridor. Leafy trees and trellised plants added rusticity to the poetry of the sunny, silent, deserted court-yard, so curiously sequestered amid the surrounding squalor. The windows of many studios gave upon it, and the backs of canvases showed from the glass annexes for *plein air* study. But as he passed under the pretty, natural porch of embowering foliage that led to the door of the studio he sought, his heart beat as nervously at the thought of again facing the Hon. Mrs. Wyndwood as when, in his young days, he had first saluted the magnificent uncle whose name he bore. He had an inward shrinking: was it wise to expose himself to the perturbation of another interview with this cold, stately creature, the image of whom, passing graciously to her carriage, was still vivid to him? But he could not go back now. He knocked at the door.

Eleanor opened the door—a radiant, adorable apparition in a

big white clay-smeared blouse with a huge serviceable pocket. He had never imagined her thus; he was as taken aback by her appearance as she by his presence. He stared at her in silence, as she stood there under the overarching greenery, with gold flecks of sunlight on her hair. But both recovered themselves in a moment; the sight of her in this homely artistic costume knocked her off the pedestal of fashion and propriety on which his mental vision had posed her; she became part of that brave young democracy of Art he had just left; and there was a charming *camaraderie* in the gay laugh with which, withdrawing her long white hands beyond reach of his proffered glove, and exhibiting them piquantly clay-covered, she cried, "Can't shake."

The seriousness of the imagined meeting vanished in a twinkling. He looked at her dancing eyes, the sweet, red mouth smiling with a gleam of lustrous teeth: he had an audacious inspiration.

"Well, then there's nothing for it but—" he said, smiling back, and finished the sentence by kissing her. Instantly her eyelids drooped, half-closing; her lips responded passionately to his.

They were withdrawn in a moment before he could realize what he had done, or the wonderful transformation in their relations.

"In the open air!" she cried, horrified, and ran within. He followed her, closing the door; his heart beat tumultuously now. Nothing could undo that moment. A wilderness of talk could not have advanced matters so far.

Through the tall glass roof of the airy studio the sun streamed in rays of dusty gold, dappling the imaginative clay models in their wet wrappings, the busts, fountains, serpents, rock-work, witches, that variegated the shelves, and lent an air of fantasy and poetry, extruding the tedious commonplace of plebeian existence, and harmonizing with the joyous aloofness of the scene in the court-yard its sense of existence in and for itself, by souls attuned to Art and dedicate to loveliness.

Mrs. Wyndwood stood, saucily beautiful, leaning against a shelf, with one hand in the pocket of her blouse, and rubbing

the clay of the other against the sides of what looked like a tin baking-dish filled with plaster-pie. How harmonious was that tilt to her nose! He had never noticed before how delightfully it turned up. She smiled roguishly.

"Imprudent creature! Suppose Olive had been in!"

The great moment was taken in a livelier key than he had ever dreamed.

"But *you* were out," he said, trying to respond to her lightness, though he trembled in every limb. He made a movement towards her. She shrank back against the shelf.

"Don't!" she cried, gayly, "you'll spoil your gloves."

He dabbled them magnificently in a heap of plaster of Paris and advanced nearer.

"Now you'll spoil my blouse," she cried, moving hastily away to dip her hands in a bowl of water.

He tore off the gloves and threw them on the floor.

"Is that a challenge?" she laughed, drying her hands, but the laughter died in a gurgle. He had stopped her breath. She did not struggle, but lay in his arms silent like a tired, lovely child—at rest, at last, her happy face pressed to his. "Oh, my dear," she murmured, cooingly. "And all those months you never kissed me once!"

"I did not dare," he answered, with a pang of remorse. "You gave me no hint that you—that you cared for me."

A beautiful blush blossomed and faded on her face. "But you should have understood. I needed the touch." And her face nestled closer against his.

Even now it seemed dream-like that this marvellous happiness should be his; that this fastidious complex creature of fashionable London whom he had dared to love should be pillowing her perfumed head on the shoulder of the man who in his laborious and wretched youth had wheeled a bird-stuffer's barrow through Whitechapel. His life lay behind him like a steep, arduous hill rising to this celestial cloudland.

"If I had only known," he said, brokenly. "Oh, how I loved you that night of the storm!"

"And how I adored you," she confessed deliciously. "You were so brave, so manly that day. You saved Olive's life, you

saved her for me and for Herbert. Oh, how noble! We none of us thanked you, it was all laughter and badinage, but you were my hero, my true, great, strong, simple man."

And her lips sought his humbly, her eyes swimming in tears.

"Let me kiss you now for your brave deed. Ah, how I was afraid when Herbert, looking through his glass, cried out that something had happened to Olive, that you had swum back for her. I felt my life growing dark. Suppose I had lost you both."

And her mobile face grew tragic at the thought. He held her tighter.

"Eleanor! It is so good to be with you!" he articulated in a hoarse whisper that was half a sob.

Her tragic features lightened to a winsome, reproachful smile.

"And when I came to your studio, Matthew, you gave me . . . tea!"

"If I had only known, if I had only dared!"

"You must dare with a woman."

Her arms had been resting on his shoulders—she threw them around his neck.

"Oh, my Master—now and ever."

Conscience slipped into paradise. He unwound her arms.

"You forget my—secret."

She moved her chin bewitchingly upward.

"You have sealed my lips."

He kissed them again. "And you can love me despite that? I am not worthy of such a sacrifice."

Her bosom heaved beneath the blouse, her eyes kindled with the old spiritual fire, her voice rang passionately.

"You *are* worthy! Life has been too cruel to you—you need a woman's heart to cherish you, you shall not be starved of the sunshine, you shall work in happiness. Ah! that is what I have learned here in this happy, liberal air. Art is the child of joyful labor—it is the sunshine of life. You are sad, miserable, and it harrows my heart. Oh, if I can bring joy and peace to the soul of a man like you, if I can indeed inspire your Art, my wretched life will not have been wasted. You have told me that I could, tell it me again."

"You, and you only, can bring me joy and peace."

She caressed his hair with a tender, protective hand. "My Matthew!" she murmured.

"And you, Eleanor," he faltered, tremulously; "I shall not make you unhappy?"

"I shall be happier than I have ever been," and her arms stole round him again in simple trust.

"Ah, I was forgetting. Life owes *you* happiness, too. If I dared to think I could bring you forgetfulness of the past!"

She shuddered. Her arms unlaced themselves of their own accord. She dropped into a chair before the table and laid them across the moulding-dish, and buried her head in her hands. He stood by helpless, torn by emotions, waiting till the flood of bitter memories should have spent itself, watching her shoulders quivering, and the sunlight lying on her hair like a consecration.

"Oh, Douglas!" she was moaning. "Did I do you wrong? Did I do you wrong? But I meant the best; I always meant the best, God knows. And you cannot chide me now you are dead and cold, and it is all so long ago."

He shivered nervously. Truly women were incomprehensible, he thought. No man could follow the leaps and turns of their emotions. They were a higher, more ethereal order of being. But he reverenced her for her loyalty to the unworthy dead, her punctilious self-torture, even while he envied the man who had been privileged to call her "wife."

He touched her hair reverently—there where the sunshine rested.

"Don't cry, dear Eleanor."

A great burst of sobbing shook her. "Oh, life is so difficult!" He bent down beside her, ineffably pitiful.

"We are going to make it easier for one another," he said, gently. His hair touched hers. She turned her tear-flecked face, and their lips met. "We are going to begin over again," he murmured. She stifled her sobs like a soothed child, and sprang up with a smile struggling through rain-clouds.

"Yes, with you I can begin over again, Master," and she looked into his face with her naïve, beseeching trustfulness.

"This is a new life already," he said, touching her blouse. She gave a laugh of childish joy.

"Yes! yes! This is a new life—the past is dead—this is my neophyte's robe. Ah, it changes one, this Paris, does it not? I am an artist, and you are my Master. It is you who have awakened me to Art! Oh, I knew this would happen. That wonderful old woman! She's a fortune-teller in Bethnal Green—the Duchess of Portsdown gave me her address—and after you were so cold to me when I came to your studio in London, I went to see her. Such a queer, wrinkled hag, and such a dingy, wretched room, up such a dirty flight of stairs—oh, I was afraid! But she was marvellous! She knew I was a widow—that I had been married unhappily—that I was a fashionable lady—though I went in my oldest clothes, and hid my rings in my purse for fear of their being stolen. Oh! by-the-way, where have I put them?" He found them and she slipped them on. "And she said I should love again and be loved. You should have seen her wicked old eyes as she spoke of love—they were like live coals. And then she predicted that I should marry again and lead a long and happy life with a dark man, distinguished and rich, who should inspire me to a new faith. Isn't it marvellous?" She took his hand and smoothed the wrist caressingly.

"It is you who have inspired me to a new faith," he answered, tremulously. "It is you who have awakened me to Art. Do you know what happened to me this morning when I went to seek you out? I, too, was reborn."

He told her the auspicious incident—how he had been photographed as part of the fresh young art-life.

She clapped her jewelled hands.

"It is providential—foreordained. We are to be happy."

"Happy!" He shivered with sudden foreboding. "Another prophetess declared I was never to be happy," he said, sadly. "To thirst, and to thirst, and never to quench my thirst!"

"Oh, that is all superstitious nonsense!" she cried, vehemently. "You *must* be happy; you *shall* be happy; the world must not lose your Art; *I* will save it."

Her face was glorified.

"But the cost to yourself," he faltered.

"I will pay the price. You love me. For me to ruin your life—*that* would be sin."

She drew his head to her bosom and smoothed back the curly hair from his forehead.

"My dear, my dear," she murmured.

He gulped back the lump in his throat. "No, this is not sin. You have redeemed me; I never felt so at peace with all things," he said, in low, religious tones. "Oh, we will shame the world—we will live high and true. Our happiness shall radiate to all that sorrows and suffers. Our home shall be the home of Art. It shall stand open to all the young artists striving faithfully in poverty—it shall be a centre of blessing. Suffering has made me morose, now I feel at one with my kind, longing to do my truest work. Oh, God bless you, my dear."

A startled look of alarm had come into her face. She loosed her embrace of him.

"But, Matt! We cannot have a home."

He had a chill of apprehension, which even the sweetness of that first clipping of his name could not counteract.

"But we love each other!"

She waved her hands agitatedly. "The world would spurn me—"

"We will spurn the world."

"Oh, but you are not thinking! Who would come to the house? How is it to be a centre of blessing?"

"We will win the world's respect. What! You and I! Are we not strong enough? You, with your noble past—I, who come from nothing and have won *you*."

"You talk like a dreamer, a poet, and I love you for it. But you do not know the world—how it ignores the realities of things."

"Oh, I know the canting hypocrisy that puts its faith in shows, and honors loveless marriage. I will teach it to respect a home of love, and the work that is its fruit. You are right, happiness is the mother of Art. Oh, how I shall work now, my dear!"

"You may overtop Raphael; you will never be a Royal Academician."

"What has my private life to do with Art?"

"Nothing with Art, but everything with English Art. You will lose your R.A."

"I shall gain you."

She shook her head.

"Why not gain both?"

"Ah, but you say it is impossible!"

"I do not say so. What need is there to wear our hearts upon our sleeves?" She touched his sleeve now, insinuating caressing fingers. "Darling, don't you see how hard it would be for me to bear—I am not a man. The worst of the scorn would be for me. Society is very hard upon those who will not be unconventional in secret. I have not your courage and strength. You will not shame me."

He weakened.

"Oh, I am thoughtless," he said, and stood miserable, unconscious of the caressing fingers.

Then his brow lightened.

"Nobody knows I'm married. If we came back and set up house together, people would think we had been married abroad."

She put her hands to her face with a desperate gesture. "Oh, but I could not bear Olive to know."

His heart leaped. "Has Herbert told her I'm married?"

"No, she doesn't know."

"He is a fine fellow."

"But she would be sure to learn it one day—it would leak out."

"Then she would keep the secret."

She shook her head. "You don't know Olive," she said from between her palms. "She is hard on women. I would have sat to you ages ago, only I was afraid of her sneers. I wouldn't have her know for worlds. I used to think her sexless."

"But now that she is to be married—"

"She will be more conventional than ever."

He tossed back his hair, impatiently. "Then we must dispense with Olive."

For a long time she did not reply. He thought his harshness towards her friend had set her crying again. He gently forced her hands from her face. It was flushed and pain-stricken.

"Forgive me. I have hurt you," he said, in contrition.

"No, you do not understand. And Olive has been so good to me. She takes charge of all my affairs—" She hesitated. "I don't even know what my income is, or"—with a pathetic engaging smile—"whether I have an income at all. And I'm afraid I spend a great deal."

He straightened his shoulders. "I am very glad of that. I will work for you. I can wring gold from the world." Rapid calculations flashed through his mind—already he regretted his last year's inactivity, the destruction of his picture.

She was blushing adorably. "No, I could not take anything from you . . . if we lived apart. No, no."

"Not from me? Oh, Eleanor. Then we must make our home together."

"But don't I tell you that is impossible?" she said, almost pettishly, on the brink of tears. "The world would get to know the truth. There is that Ruth Hailey you spoke of, who knows your brother, and who through her connection with Linda Verder gets brought into contact with all sorts of people. And your wife would hear of it, too. Unscrupulous persons would egg her on to move. There would be blackmailing, everything sordid and horrible." She shuddered violently. . . . "Oh, you do not know the world—you have lived with your eyes shut, fixed on inward visions."

He opened them now, startled to find himself lectured for want of worldliness by this ethereal creature. She dissipated his uneasy bewilderment by a swift transition, her face dimpled itself with reassuring smiles. She pulled the little curly lock at his forehead with a fascinating tug.

"Don't be such a hot-headed Quixote, dear. There is time enough to plan out the future. Circumstances may change—" Her face saddened. "The poor creature may be taken . . . and your idea may seem more plausible when I have got used to

it—you come with a rush and a crash—like those waves that night." She smiled wistfully. "And I am only a woman, and timid. Can't you see I have been frightened to death all this last half-hour?"

"Frightened of me?"

"No," with a pathetic smile. "Frightened of Olive. Twenty times I thought I caught her footsteps."

"What if she does come! She won't be surprised to see me here."

"No, but I have a plan. It will be safest if she doesn't know you're in Paris at all. You must leave me at once."

His heart sank. "But when do I see you?"

"Next Sunday evening."

"A whole week?" The sunlight seemed gone.

"On Sunday morning Olive goes to Brussels for a few days—she's only waiting to finish that statuette of Fate, isn't it weird? All those things there are Olive's handiwork; how clever she is! I only do the menial work of pouring in the plaster. It saves money, because—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, impatiently. "And on Sunday evening?"

"You will call for me here—say about seven—you will take me to dinner, somewhere quiet in this great free Paris." She made a great circle with her arms, as if enjoying the elbow-room. "And then—" she smiled intoxicatingly, "then we can talk over the future." Her eyes looked heavenly promise. He caught her in his arms. This time she struggled away.

"No, no! She may be back at any moment. I hear footsteps. You must go."

She pushed him towards the door.

"Mayn't I write?"

"No, Olive would see the letter."

The footsteps passed by.

He looked back in reluctant farewell, as he fumbled at the door-handle. She was close behind him.

She opened her arms, and his head was on her breast again. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she murmured, "it is hard to wait."

Then she pushed him outside, her face grown spiritual again

in its anxiety, and she slammed the door, and he reeled like a drunken man.

Her last look haunted him—soulful, alluring, intoxicating. He was almost sobbing with happiness. Heaven had been kind to him at last. The balmy air of the court-yard fanned his brow. He walked on aimlessly, in a beatific dream, past the beautiful Ionic portico, through the corridor, into the street, no longer grimy, and so on to the Boulevards.

How happy the world was! How the sunshine streamed with its dancing motes! How gay the kiosks with their dainty posters and the piquant designs of great caricaturists laughing from the front pages of the illustrated journals! How light-hearted those bourgeois drinking red wine at the *al fresco* tables! What a jolly, bulbous-nosed old cabman that was who hailed him, not knowing he had quicksilver in his veins, and must needs give his limbs to lively motion. He sauntered on at random, buoyant, treading on sunbeams, a song at his heart, breathing in the sense of the spacious, airy city that sparkled in the spring sunshine, mother of nimble spirits; he crossed the river, glittering in a long sweep, with Notre Dame rising on its island in picturesque antiquity; the book-stalls on the quays thrilled him with a remembrance of the joys of reading; he strode on humming a merry tune, the bustle of traffic was a musical accompaniment to it; he stopped at a great leafy square, alive with pedestrians, to watch the limpid water leaping from a beautiful fountain; around him were the seductive programmes of theatres, eloquent of artistic acting, of fine comedy, of poetic tragedy. He strolled along, absorbing noble buildings, and churches, and splendid public monuments. How fair life was, how marvellously compacted! Gladness was at the heart of all things.

The city passed into his soul as never before; its radiant message of elegance, proportion, style, sanity, unity, lucidity, exquisite sensibility to the material, balanced by an æsthetic delight in ideas, and the spirit of gayety all over; henceforth, thanks to Eleanor, he would be of it, following Art for the joy of Art, out of the happiness of the soul, sun-clear, without stagnant vapors of discontent, those fits of spleen bred of foggy, uncouth London; he would be fixed at last, swinging steadily

on a pivot of happiness, a lover of life and a praiser thereof. All its sweetness had been diverted from him—it had passed to others. Now at last he would be self-centred. He rambled on, he crossed the Pont Passy, and saw the old city rising quaint and steep in wooded terraces. Oh, love and life! Oh, life and love! Why had people besmirched the Creation with soilures of cynicism, plaguing the air with pessimistic laments, graceless grunts of swine nosing garbage?

What good times he had had himself, he who had won fame and gold while still young! And how ungraciously he had accepted these gifts of the gods, mewling and whining like a sulky child. Surely he deserved that hell allotted in Dante for those who had wilfully lived in sadness. The gracious romance of life—that was what his Art should henceforth interpret. He began to dream beautiful masterpieces, and they reminded him that he had come to see the Salon. He retraced his steps towards the Champs Elysées, watching the endless procession of elegant equipages rolling steadily to and from the Bois, with their panorama of luxurious women. He entered the Salon; the pictures delighted him, the crowd enraptured him, a young girl's face stirred him to a mood of paternal benediction; he met Edward Cornpepper, A.R.A., there, and felt the little man was his dearest friend. Cornpepper introduced him to his newly-acquired wife, who said the Exhibition was indecent.

"You are right, my dear, there isn't a decent picture here," Cornpepper chuckled, grimacing to adjust his monocle, and feeling his round beard. "Ichabod! The glory is departed from Paris. The only chaps who can paint nowadays are the Neo-Teutonic school. The Frenchmen are played out—they have even lost their taste. They bought a picture of mine last year, you remember. I palmed off the rottenest thing I'd ever done on 'em. It's in the Luxembourg—you go and see it, old man, and you tell me if I'm not right. Now, mind you do! Ta, ta, old fellow. Sorry you're not in the Academy this year—but it's a good advertisement for you. I think I shall be ill myself next year. But we mustn't talk shop. Good-bye, old man. Oh, by-the-way, I hear your cousin's engaged to an heiress. It's true, is it? Lucky beggar, that Herbert! Better than painting, eh?

Ha! ha! ha! But I knew he'd never do anything. Didn't he win the Gold Medal, eh? Ho! ho! ho! Well, au revoir. Don't forget the Luxembourg. You don't want to wait till I'm dead and in the Louvre, what? Thanks for a pleasant chat, and wish you better."

Matthew shook his hand for the third time with unabated affection. What a clever fellow Cornpepper was, and what a pretty wife he had got!

He went to his hotel to dine. The court-yard was gay with lounging, lolling visitors, the fountain in the centre leaped and sparkled with changing colors, like an effervescence of the city. Far into the night he sat out on the balcony of his gilt-skied, many-mirrored bedroom, gazing at the beautiful Boulevards stretching serenely away in the moonlight between their gigantic edifices.

CHAPTER IX

RUTH HAILEY

How he lived through the rest of the week he never definitely remembered. He would have willingly given the days away, but, as they had to be filled up somehow, they left confused recollections of theatres and ballets, of rencontres with random acquaintances, of riding on tiny tram-cars to see the Zoological Garden in the Bois de Boulogne, of wandering in a rag-fair, of reading modern French poetry, of visiting the ateliers of French painters whom he knew, and sympathizing with their grumbles against the Institute and the distribution of decorations, while wondering inwardly why these overgrown schoolboys languished and died for lack of a bit of ribbon. What could a man want in life but to paint and to love? State recognition? Bah! The artist was always an Anarchist. He stood alone, self-centred.

He hobnobbed with students, too, in his new sympathy with youth and art, and—a distinguished visitor—was taken through the great ateliers with their rainbow-colored dados of palette-

scrapings and the announcements in every European language that new-comers must pay for drinks. He gladly accepted a ticket for a students' ball on the Saturday night; it had been postponed for a few weeks through the death of a beloved professor. He had heard much of these balls, but had never seen one, and he counted upon it to while away that last intolerable night between him and his happiness.

Several times during the week he had thought of going to see Ruth Hailey in accordance with the duty that on the other side of the Channel had seemed so pressing, but he shrank instinctively from the raking up of memories of the old unhappy days at this joyous crisis; he was not in the mood for extraneous emotion. Nevertheless on the Saturday afternoon, partly for want of anything better to do, partly to keep up to himself the pretence that she was at least one of the motives that brought him to Paris, and partly to ascertain if she had spoken to people in England about his wife, he set out to pay the long-projected visit. He would feel how the ground lay, discover if she had innocently betrayed him to anybody who might touch Mrs. Wyndwood's circle — which might be awkward if in a possible compromise Eleanor should ever decide to live with him in ostensible marriage.

He had a dim, unformed idea of appealing to Ruth for silence, but he did not really meditate invoking her sympathies; she was on the eve of departing for the Antipodes—was perhaps already gone.

He found her hotel—it was in the Rue de Rivoli. A waiter took up his name and forthwith brought back word that Mademoiselle would see Monsieur Strang.

His heart was throbbing curiously as he mounted the stairs and stood outside her door. The quick, irregular clack, clack of a type-writer responded like an echo. He was ushered into a large plainly-furnished sitting-room. His first vision was of a tall comely lady in a grayish gown, writing at a table opposite the door; but this was effaced by the slimmer figure of a younger woman approaching from the right, with a smile of welcome and an extended hand. A moment later her smile had faded, and her hand was on her heart, soothing its flutter. He was

shaken to his depths; behind all the bodily changes he saw the little girl-friend of his childhood; and, indeed, the purity of her limpid, truthful gaze was undimmed.

"Ruth!" he cried in alarm, moving forward as if to sustain her.

She drew herself up, rigid and frozen; then her face relaxed, suffused by a wan smile and a returning flood of carmine. She held out her hand with a nervous laugh.

"How are you, Mr. Strang? I thought it was Billy, and to see you instead startled me."

As he took the little hand and looked into her face, maturer than its years, though it had not lost its olden charm, especially in the complexion, which was marvellously pure and soft, registering every slightest change of thought and feeling in dainty flickers of rose across its delicate fairness, his soul was invaded by a rush of tender memories, incongruously jostling in his brain: the thrills and raptures of boyhood, the joys of coasting down the slopes, and snaring rabbits and shooting partridges; the glow of skating; the delicious taste of the home-made cakes; the songs and hymns of childhood, the firelight casting shadows on the dusky walls, while his mother read the Bible; the drone of the fusty-coated preacher in the little wooden meeting-house; the thwacking of the dancers' feet in the barn, the odors of hay and the lowing of cattle; the gleam of the yellow-tipped mullein by the wayside and the smell of the wild flowers in the woods; the note of the whippoorwill in the forest at twilight; the long cranes floating over the summer marshes; the buzz of fresh young voices in McTavit's school-room. All these came back—dear and desirable, steeped in tears, softened by distance to a pensive beauty, like bawling choruses heard from afar across still water, inextricably interwoven with all the pieties of childhood, the simple sense of God and truth and honor and righteousness.

He stood holding her hand, oblivious of the present, in a whirling chaos of ancient images that melted his soul to childish tenderness, and brought back to it the child's clear, unquestioning perception of spiritual ideas which had grown shadowy in the atmosphere of salons and studios and fashionable churches, that stereoscopic vision of the saint and the child

which sees the spiritual solid. But Ruth disengaged her fingers at last, blushing under the kindly smile of the comely lady.

"This is Mr. Matthew Strang, Linda," she said. "Mr. Strang, let me introduce you to Mrs. Verder."

He bowed: "Oh, I have heard of Linda Verder," he said, smiling.

"And I have heard more of Matthew Strang," she replied, beamingly.

"That is scarcely possible," he murmured.

She laughed with a bird-like trill. "Oh, I wasn't alluding merely to your public career, though our sweet Ruth has gotten a whole album full of newspaper-cuttings about that. But it is of you yourself and your childhood that I have heard so much. So you see I *have* the advantage of you. But you will excuse me, I know; I have to go out. You needn't bother about those letters, dear. We're nearly through with them." And with an affectionate nod to Ruth and a beneficent smile to Matthew, she left the room. He was reddening: he was beginning to feel uncomfortable under Mrs. Verder's smiles, which in their insinuation of old sweetheartship made it certain that Ruth had never mentioned his marriage to her friend even; to hear that the forgotten Ruth had been following his career all those years gave him an odd pathetic shiver. She and Billy—and Heaven knew what others—were sunning themselves in the mere reflected rays of that fame which had left him cold.

She stood away from him, shy and equally embarrassed, the blood ebbing and flowing in the pure, soft cheek.

"Won't you sit down?" she said at last.

"Oh, thank you!" he replied, and took a distant chair.

She sat down behind her type-writer, facing him. There was a silence. She was the first to break it.

"I was so sorry to read you were ill."

"Oh, it was nothing," he murmured.

"I am so pleased we hadn't left—we are sailing next Tuesday. It is so good of you to come and see me, with the many claims that you must have on your time."

"It is a pleasure to be reminded of old times. I was sorry I missed you the time you called at my house," he said, awkwardly.

"I was very sorry, too."

"But you know I work at my studio," he explained, trying not to flush. "There is no room at home."

"Yes, I know. But I didn't care to call there and interrupt your work. Billy showed me the little room where you used to work in the olden days. I thought it real nice of you to turn it into a study for him, and to take care of him as you are doing. He sent me a story of his. No; it wasn't very good, poor fellow!" she added, seeing the question in his face. "Rather too full of passionate love-making."

"Not published?"

"No—in manuscript. I returned it to him type-written. He was enraptured. He said it was like seeing himself in print."

"Ah! we are not so used to the type-writer as you Americans."

"It is coming in fast, though; even into your slow, old country, if you consider it yours," she added, slyly. "I am delighted to see how many offices the new-fangled machine has crept into; in two years it will be in every business office."

"Why delighted? Have you or Mrs. Verder shares in the patent?"

"No, no," she said, gently. "Don't you see it is a new occupation for women?"

He smiled.

"Ah, I remember. That's your hobby."

"Oh, not hobby, Mr. Strang, not hobby. It is my life-work. But I can't expect you to sympathize with these sordid, practical things," she said, smiling. "Your life is devoted to the gospel of the Beautiful."

"Oh, but I do sympathize," he cried, remorsefully. "I think it is very fine of you."

She shook her head, her smile fading.

"You don't—you can't. You are outside the circle of the material worries of the poor; or, what is worse, the genteel. And nobody but a woman can know the tragic pettiness of the life-struggle for single girls—the stifled aspirations, the abortive longings, the tears in the night. Christ would have understood. But He was not a man."

He saw the blur of emotion veil her eyes ere she turned her head hastily away. He felt his own sight growing dim; an understratum of his consciousness admired the flow of her language, and divined platform experiences. He had never before thought of her as clever.

She recovered herself in a moment, and resumed, playfully:

"No, if you were a black-and-white artist you would have sketched Mrs. Verder with corkscrew ringlets and crying for trousers. We do want the Franchise and the right to dress as we please, but these are only incidental aspects of the movement for the independence of women, though they lend themselves most readily to caricature. The woman of the future is simply the working woman. All we really want is to make girls economically independent of marriage; able to choose their mates from love instead of selling themselves for a home."

He could not meet her frank eyes; he was suddenly reminded of his own marriage. What would this stainless soul think of him if she knew he had sold himself, or—worse—if she knew why he had come to her this afternoon? He murmured, surveying the carpet, that he knew life was hard for girls, but that he hoped she at least had not been unhappy.

"I? Oh! I've been as happy as the next girl, though I've had my trials," she said, cheerily, between smiles and tears. "But I am grateful to God for them, else I should never have learned to sympathize as I do, and I should not have served the Master. My life might have been wasted in mere happiness."

Mere happiness! The phrase went through him like a sword.

"But *you* had no need to work for a living," he said, dubiously.

"Indeed I had! I had nothing."

"You had a father."

"Of a kind. But I quarrelled with him. You heard that, of course."

He had heard of it, of course, but her affairs had made trivial dints upon his consciousness.

"Why did you quarrel with him?" he asked.

Her face became a crimson mask. She lowered her head.

"Oh—I beg your pardon," he stammered in distress. "Of course I had no right to ask."

She was silent, her fingers nervously picking out letters on the type-writer. Then her eyes met his unflinchingly again.

"No, in a way you have a right to ask," she said, uneasily. "I don't see why I shouldn't tell you—it's so long ago. You know I became the Deacon's book-keeper?"

He nodded, wondering.

"He made me keep all his accounts. I learned all about his affairs. Well, one day, looking over the books, I made a discovery."

"Yes?"

She hesitated. Her face was still fiery. The image of the mumbling, quid-chewing Deacon, with the roundabout methods of arriving at his point, rose vivid to his memory. He remembered his childish strain to understand "Ole Hey's" good advice. Pop! Pop! Pop! It was like the clack, clack, clack of the type-writer under Ruth's nervous, unconscious fingers. But what was this she was saying to the accompaniment of the erratic automatic music?

"I discovered that he was cheating you, or rather your sister and Abner Preep, that he had always bamboozled your father, that the mortgage was more than paid off long before, aside from the work he had gotten out of your brothers and sisters." She paused, then hastened on with a lighter tone. "So, of course, being a foolish, hot-headed girl, I wouldn't stay any longer in his house unless he repaid you, and equally of course he refused, knowing I wouldn't make a scandal, and so I went off to the only relative I had in the world—my mother's sister in Portland, Maine. She was too poor to give me more than food and shelter. But my knowledge of book-keeping soon got me a place in a store. And ever since I have earned my own bread, Heaven be thanked."

She was not looking at him now; her fingers were still lightly tapping the letters into combinations that spelled only embarrassment. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you — but you won't take action now, will you?"

"No, seeing that the money has been paid!" he cried, hoarsely, with a sudden intuition. He sprang up agitatedly. "You sent us all that money anonymously—from Maine!"

Her head drooped lower. "Oh, I felt I oughtn't to say anything," she cried in vexation.

"But you did, didn't you?"

"It was such a trifle, anyhow," she said, deprecatingly.

"It was a fortune then—five hundred dollars!"

"I could do no less. There was no other call for the money I earned in those first few years, while my aunt still lived. And I thought that perhaps—" He came towards her. "That perhaps—that perhaps it might help you in your career—my aunt corresponded with my poor mother's friends in Cobequid Village—I knew how you were slaving and sending money to your folks."

"God bless you, Ruth."

"I hope it was a little help to you, Matt." He thrilled under the name, spoken for the first time. "I have often liked to think it was—that I had a wee finger in the making of a great artist."

Her words cut him to the heart. How could he tell her that her money had come too late? He was about to murmur something, but she stopped him.

"No, don't answer me for fear you should dispel my illusion. It has been such a joy to me when I read about your rapid rise to say to myself: 'Ah, perhaps *we* know something.' But half the joy was in the secrecy; now you have found me out, don't take away the relics of my pleasure."

"But why should you bother to read things about me?" he murmured, only half sincerely, for another and more agitating suspicion was fast germinating in his breast.

She flashed a quick glance up at him as he stood over her, then looked down again indifferently, her sweet mouth quivering. "Oh, why should I not be proud of knowing, if only in boyhood, the only great man our township ever produced?"

But he had now been trained in woman's looks. Rosina and Eleanor had taught him much, and the thought that was borne in upon him now—the conviction that Ruth, too, loved him, that she had always cherished her childish affection, though his own had been swamped by his craving for Art—was not the complacent conviction of a coxcomb. It was a chilling agony.

It pierced his breast like a jagged icicle. He had an appalling sense as of responsibility for a ruined life. The image of "Aunt Clara" flashed suddenly before him—careworn, faded, broken-down, unlovely. Was that to be the end of Ruth—the sweet playmate, the great soul?

"And you, too, have done something in life," he said, as if to reassure himself, trying to curve his trembling lips to a smile.

She looked up frankly at him. "In so far as I have been able to help Linda to help other girls."

"And do you meditate—helping Linda all your life?"

"With God's help."

"Even," he essayed to smile again, "even if you marry?"

"Oh, but I won't marry," she said, quickly, and kept her face bravely raised to his, though the tell-tale rose was coming and going on her transparent skin.

"Not even"—his smile was a ghastly caricature—"to spite the caricaturists?"

She smiled a faint response. "Not even for that. Has not Linda sacrificed herself on that altar? It's true she's a widow, but still—"

He could not help asking the question: "But why won't you marry?"

"Because I don't want to. Is that a woman's reason?" And she smiled again.

"Ruth!" he cried, frenziedly, in a strange mixture of emotions. "I am not worthy to kneel to you!"

She opened her eyes, wondering: "Because I prefer celibacy? Because my life is happy enough as it is; because, thanks to Mrs. Verder, it is sufficiently filled with activity and movement?"

"Oh, if it is, if it is!" he cried, almost hysterically.

"Certainly it is. You men are all so mistaken about women. Marriage may be a necessity for some women, but not for all—oh, thank God! not for all. It may be harder for Linda, who has known a husband's love—but for me? Oh, I am perfectly happy." She rose and moved away from him, and began to walk restlessly up and down, talking rapidly. "It is perfectly

absurd, this making marriage and happiness synonyms. Novels end with marriage, and that is called a happy ending. Good heavens! It is quite as often an unhappy beginning! If you had seen the things I have seen, heard the tales women have told me! Even the women you would imagine the most enviable are full of worries. Why, look at your own wife, Mr. Strang, who has everything to make her happy." And her lips parted in a faint smile.

He turned his face away. "Did she also tell you tales of woe?" he said, with a forced laugh.

"Well, not precisely woe, but plenty of anxiety about the children, and about the dishonesty of her helps, and she seemed rather poorly, too. I hope you left her strong and well."

"Thank you," he murmured, flushing.

"How proud she is of you," Ruth went on. "I was so glad to find that she really appreciated you. I had often wondered. And it isn't only on account of your importance, Matthew Strang! She told me you were goodness itself, which, of course, I knew, and that you had long wished her to move to a better neighborhood, only she was afraid to put you to expense. What a good woman she must be! And so pretty too!"

"Do you think so?" he muttered. His face was still averted.

"Yes, and I seem to remember her in your earliest pictures. She's the woman in 'Motherhood,' isn't she?"

"I think she sat for the figure," he said, hesitatingly. "I couldn't afford models then. I wish you weren't going so soon. I should so like to do a sketch of you—something to remember you by."

She shook her head. "We have so much to do this week. I shouldn't have time."

"I am sorry. Perhaps we shall never meet again," he said in low tones. "I never even had a photograph of you—I could do a sketch from that."

"I don't think I have any. You did a sketch of me once," she reminded him, "but I'm not going to give you that. That's

precious—an example of your first manner." The gay note in her voice sounded rather strained. "Don't you remember? You sent it me when you first went to Halifax, please don't remember how many years ago."

But he did remember. And he remembered, too, how he had sent it her as a slight return for the *Arabian Nights*. He had lost her gift (through the carelessness of Jack Floss) very soon after, but she cherished his still.

He moved to her side, watching her rummage among heaps of papers. He saw the backs of two photographs, and picked them up. One was a portrait of Linda Verder, the other of himself.

"Both public celebrities," she said, with a little confused laugh. "I've never attained to the shop-windows, so naturally I am scarcer." She continued her search, and at last turned up something. "Ah, there's an old one—or rather a young one. Me at sixteen! Goodness, to think I've still got that!"

His flaccid nerves sent fresh moisture to his eyes as he gazed at the simple picture of the sweet, delicate, girlish face, with large eyes luminous with dreams, looking out shyly upon life in a sort of wistful wonder and expectation, unconscious, unprophetic of the blank years when eyes grow dim with sudden unsought tears.

His voice was broken as he said: "Thank you. This is the picture I would most have wished to have. Henceforward I shall think of you, earnest, truthful, aspiring . . . as you have thought of me all these years. And now I suppose I must not keep you any longer from your duties."

"Oh, they are nothing. It is your time that is precious, I know. I am rejoiced to have had this glimpse of you in your fame and happiness. I shall always remember this afternoon. Good-bye, Mr. Strang." She held out her hand.

He put his, with the portrait, behind his back. "No, I won't," he said, petulantly. "Not if you call me that."

She dropped her hand with a sad smile.

"You see I belong to the rejected, Matt."

He quivered as at a thrust.

"No, you are of the elect, of the saints of this earth."

Her smile took on the wistfulness of her early portrait. They stood looking at each other in a tender embarrassment.

"Oh, by-the-way, Matt, you will not mind my speaking of her . . . she belongs to me a little as well as to you, you know . . . I went to see your poor mother before I left for Europe."

He shuddered.

"Did she recognize you?" he said, in a half-whisper.

She shook her head. Her face was drawn with the pain of the memory. "But she is quite gentle, except when she quotes texts. They give her simple housework to do—it provides a vent for her activity . . . marriages are not always happy, you see." A wan smile flitted across her features. "I shall go to see her again. Poor creature! I forgot her when I called you happy. The thought of her must always sadden you."

He would not trust his voice to reply. He transferred the photograph to his left hand, and held out the right in silence. She put her hand into his.

"Good-bye, Matt; perhaps forever."

He struggled to speak.

"Good-bye, Ruth." He bent nearer. "May I not kiss you . . . for auld lang syne?"

She withdrew her hand. Her voice was tremulous and low. "We are not playmates now, Matt."

He held up the photograph.

"Then I will kiss the girl I used to know."

He pressed his lips reverentially to it.

She smiled sadly.

"Good-bye again, dear Matt. God bless you."

He hurried from the room, overwhelmed with emotion. The door closed upon him, and he leaned against the balustrade for a moment to recover himself.

Clack! clack! clack! clack! clack!

It was the steady, business-like clatter of determined work. She had taken up the burden of Duty again.

CHAPTER X

THE MASTER

He half groped his way down the stairs. In this mist of tears all things were obscured, even the image of Eleanor Wyndwood. No, one thing was clear—the figure of the sweet Puritan woman with her simple righteousness.

He emerged into the Rue de Rivoli with its pretentious architecture, its glittering shop windows, its bustle of life; across the road the gardens of the Tuileries stretched away in the sunshine; but the gentle figure stood between him and Paris. He tried to shake her off, to think of the transcendent raptures that awaited him on the morrow; he tried to see Eleanor's face steadily, but it was all wavering lines like a reflection in storm-shaken water. He bethought himself of selecting the secluded restaurant and hiring the private room for the dinner, but the figure of Ruth resurged, blotting Eleanor's out. He took out her photograph and kissed it again. "She's a little angel," he cried, aloud. And then, from that chaos of ancient memories, freshly stirred up, came like an echo Mad Peggy's cry, "She's a little angel. . . ." A girl passing him laughed in his face, and he put away the portrait, flushing and chilled to the marrow.

He told himself he must soak himself in Paris and forget her. He walked towards the Grand Boulevards, trying vainly to absorb and assimilate the gayety of the streets. He returned to his hotel and dressed, and dined with dainty dishes and sparkling wines, such as Herbert himself would have recommended. But the quivering roots of his being had been laid bare; his soul vibrated with intangible memories, and the image of Ruth still possessed his imagination—the candid eyes, the pure skin. As ever his soul was touched through the concrete.

After dinner he wandered about the gay city, adding the red of his cigar-tip to the feverish dusk athrob with a myriad stars above and a myriad lights below; the soft spring air was charged with the pleasurable hum of ceaseless pedestrians; the theatres and music-halls and dancing places blazoned themselves upon the night; the great restaurants flared within and without, their pavement tables thronged with light-hearted men and pretty women, gossiping, laughing, clinking glasses. Women, everywhere women. They looked out even from the illustrated papers of the illumined kiosks. The shining city seemed to waft an incense of pleasure up to the stars; to breathe out an aroma of sinless voluptuousness that rose like a thank-offering for life. His heart expanded to all this happiness; he felt himself being caught up by the great joyous wave, and Eleanor Wyndwood's face came back, radiant and seductive. But Ruth Hailey was still at his side, and ever and anon he saw her as in her later guise — stern, sorrowful, negativing; she stood out against the whole city.

He seated himself before one of the innumerable little marble *guéridons*. He was at the cross-roads of the great arteries dominated by the fulgent façade of the Opera House, where he could watch the perpetual currents of gladsome life. He observed the countless couples with emotion, striving to concentrate himself on the thought of his imminent happiness, when the love that sustained the world and made it sustainable should be his at last; when he should become as other men, living the natural life of the race and the sexes in sympathetic fusion. But the figure of Ruth Hailey stood firm amid the swirling crowds, and her pure eyes shamed his thought, and filled his breast with an aching tenderness for the poor human atoms he had deserted — for Rosina, for Billy, for "Aunt Clara" — for whom there was no happiness and no natural life. He fought against this obsession of Ruth's spirit, he struggled to fix his vision on the glitter and the gayety, but he had to see her standing like a rock or a tower, four-square against smiling, treacherous seas.

But if he went back to Rosina in honorable acknowledged union, then farewell to Society! To take her about with him

was out of the question; she would be more unhappy than he in those high glacial latitudes of humanity. Well, what was Society to him? He could shake it off as easily as the Micmac of his childhood shook off the clothes of Christendom. To be shut out from Society were no privation for him. He had the advantage of his fellow-artists, who sacrificed at its shrine and were sacrificed to it. He could couch on fir boughs, he had lived on bread and water. This constant concern with wines and cookery, with couches and carriages; this gorging and gormandizing and self-pampering—did it add dignity to life? Was it worth the hecatomb of hearts and souls offered up for it—this low luxury of the higher classes? Was not simplicity the note of greatness—in life as in Art? And howsoever simple the complex comfort of their lives might seem to those born to it, was it for artists to imitate this lowest side of the upper classes, especially if it frittered away their Art? Was it for Bohemia to ape Philistia, and for Art—the last of the rebels against the platitudinization of life—to bow the knee and swear allegiance to the vulgar ideals of fashion? They had drawn him even from boyhood, these showy ideals; from the days when he had peered wistfully into the cricket-ground at Halifax. But he was done with boyhood now.

Ah, but if he went back to Rosina—and the new thought struck a chill as of graveyard damps—it was all over with his Art. That, just beginning to revive under the inspiration of Eleanor Wyndwood, would be a sheer impossibility under the daily oppression of Rosina with her kitchen horizon. His imagination would be clogged with the vapors of cabbage. And of the old bad work he had had enough. He would retire from Art as from Society, and the Exhibitions should know him no more. He would go out of the business; that was all it was, he told himself with a bitter smile. His fame was a bauble, a bagatelle. For all it mattered to him it might have been his dead uncle, Matthew Strang, whose name was on the lips of strangers. There was still work in the world for an honest man to do; he remembered again that his hands could wield more than the brush; besides, he had a little capital now, Rosina had still her income. Perhaps they would go back to Nova Scotia

and buy a farm. They would sow and reap, far from the glare of cities, and the sweet, simple sun and rain would bless the work of their hands. His life would be joyless, but perchance his soul would be at peace.

Yes, but to give up Art! Art, which was the meaning of his life! Rosina's life stood for nothing. It was out of all proportion to give up his for hers. Had he not suffered enough? Had he not already expiated his marriage, the hapless union he had entered into when distracted by illness and disgrace and hunger, when perhaps his whole future had hinged—such were the tragi-whimsical turns of life—on his reluctance to change his last two dollars?

He rose and walked about restlessly through the glistening streets. Everywhere restaurants, open-air tables, men, women. He wandered to Montmartre. More restaurants, more couples, cafés, cabarets, queer entertainments: *Le Chat Noir*, *Le Rat Mort*, the red sails of the famous Mill turning tirelessly, lights, gayety, women, always women, of all shades of prettiness and piquancy, with rosy cheeks and lips not always painted, and eyes that could shine without bismuth. He walked back through the Grand Boulevards—they were one flush of life.

But the reasoning was inexorable. He had sacrificed Rosina to his Art; Art had slipped through his fingers, but Rosina remained none the less sacrificed. Now his Art must be sacrificed to Rosina—the atonement was logical. That was not a surrender, he told himself angrily, to Ruth Hailey's view of life—a view whose narrowness he and everybody around him had outgrown. He refused to recognize, in the face of this radiant Paris, that each human soul came into the world to sacrifice its happiness to other human souls. That seemed to him a preposterous paradox rather than a solution; a world of reciprocal whipping-boys was an absurdity, and, at any rate, if such were the scheme of creation, it did not work at all with the gross run of mankind, to say nothing of animals. The only reason for going back to Rosina must be honestly to fulfil his side of the bargain. She had done her part, he must do his. That his return to her meant the ruin of his life and his life-work was not her concern; these larger issues were too wide for her compre-

hension ; she loved her husband and she desired him. That was enough. He owed himself to her, and to shirk his obligation was as dishonorable as to disown a debt. He had paid off the Stasborough store-keeper, although absolved by bankruptcy ; he must be equally honorable with Rosina, though his life had been bankrupted. Practically his Art had always been sacrificed to her ; it was her pettiness that had driven him to produce in haste for the market, so as to escape indebtedness to her ; well, let the sacrifice be consummated.

He had come to the Place de la Concorde—it seemed a fairy-land of romantic lights, a dance of fire-flies ; it wooed him towards the calm and solitude of the river. He leaned on the parapet and saw the sombre, fire-shot water stretching away in marvellously solemn beauty, hushed and lonely, its many-twinkling perspective of green and red and yellow gleams palpitating in the air dim with a yearning poetry. He felt the presence of Ruth Hailey at his side ; she looked like the photograph now ; he held her little hand and gazed into her candid eyes. Good God ! This girl had loved him all those long years, and would be hopelessly faithful even unto death.

But if he went back to Rosina, what of Eleanor Wyndwood ? Would he spoil her life, too ? and more culpably than he had spoiled Ruth Hailey's ? He sighed wearily ; it was impossible to do wrong and have the result simple. Life was so intercomplicated. But he had been honest with Eleanor, thank heaven ; she knew the truth about his life ; he would be honest with her to the end. He would tell her the truth now. The same noble, uncalculating simplicity that had accorded him friendship, that had been ready to give him love, would bear her triumphantly through the new trial. He remembered her brave words : "If I did not suffer I should think I had not grown." Perhaps there would be consolation for both in the thought that she remained unsullied before the world.

He crossed the river, and his mood changed. He got towards the Latin Quarter, and wandered into the "Boule Miche" amid the students' restaurants, where young humanity sat in its couples again, amorous and gay ; every place was full within and without, and there was the gurgle of liquids with

the sounds of singing and laughter; he was back again amid the blithe, insouciant, easy-going life of the eternal undergraduate, with the local variation of bocks; rakish young men danced through the restaurants arm in arm in tipsy merriment; poets with lack-lustre visages and tumbled hair imbibed vermouth, clinking glasses with their mistresses; the smoky air vibrated with irresponsible gayety; it was full of invitations to careless happiness, joyous levity, forgetfulness of an austere view of life. Puritanism seemed a form of dementia, asceticism a sunless folly. The atmosphere gained upon him. He tossed off a bock, then walked recklessly past Mrs. Wyndwood's studio. The whole court-yard was in darkness, but he thought of to-morrow night, and it glowed as with bonfires of joy. He resolved to sup famously. He jumped into a victoria and drove to a fashionable restaurant. It was near midnight; the theatres had emptied, but the streets were only the fuller. He passed through rooms full of dazzling women in gorgeous evening costumes, sipping champagne; women, always women: the city blossomed with them like roses. He ordered some oysters and chablis, and forgot to eat; opposite him a self-conscious celebrity of the footlights, blazing with diamonds, held her court, surrounded by a bevy of dandies; behind him a black-eyed *demi-mondaine* in red playfully rapped her cavalier's knuckles; at the next table the exuberant liveliness of a supper party diverted him; he drank, drank, listening greedily to the gay repartees. Life should be joy, joy, joy, he thought. That was what modern life lacked, gray with problems, wrinkled with thought. These people lived—lived in splendid insolence under the midnight sun. There was a touch of bigness that appealed to him in their arrogant vitality. Society was an organized insipidity, afraid of life.

The figure of Ruth Hailey rose rebuking; he paid the bill and went out.

But his heart cried, ached for happiness. Ah, no! He could not give up so young; go into a living grave. He roved the Boulevards again. The beautiful city solicited him, rouged and perfumed, clad in shining garments, with star-gemmed hair. But the virginal figure of Ruth Hailey, with sweet

shy eyes, stood against the city. Paris seemed garish beside her.

He was fluctuating again. It seemed as if the simple girl would draw him away from all the joys of life. Was there no means of ridding himself of her haunting presence? A grotesque mask looked out of a cab. Ah! the fancy ball! He had forgotten. That would lay the ghost of his disordered imagination. He felt in his pocket and found the ticket; he hastened to the scene of revelry. A clatter of cabs and a blaze of lights—he had arrived.

The first glimpse within was exhilarating, provoking, dazzling, overwhelming; he had a confused sense of a hall of a thousand lights and mirrors, reeking with scent and heat, reverberant with music and shrieks and laughter, white with the whirling gleam of semi-nude women, and motley with the rainbow hues and multiplied reflections of male masqueraders; a mad, joyous orgy, the diabolical medley of a glittering, tinselled pantomime and an opium-eater's nightmare. Ah, here was oblivion of Ruth Hailey at last, and he eagerly took up a position on a raised platform that ran along the side of the gigantic ball-room, trying to catch the contagion of the scene, and ready to rush into the heart of the devil-may-care jollity. The gleeful, palpitating pageant—a twisted, tangled kaleidoscopic rally of riotous color and flesh tones — tore past him, dancing, leaping, shrieking, wantoning, clowning, kissing, uncouth as the gargoyles of Notre Dame and brilliant as the midnight Boulevard: Japanese figures and demons, gladiators in cuirasses and bathing drawers, Gallic warriors in skins, brawny barbarians in blankets, Amazons with brass breasts, a savage in a girdle of fig-leaves, a real Samoan girl with coal-black hair in the convoy of her Russian lover in a tall white hat, a boy as a German girl, and an elderly woman as a gendarme with orange blossoms in her hair; one man with a helmet crowned by a black cat, and another with a mock broken head, reddened bandages, and a hideous stream of blood on his shirt-front. And women — always women; a few masked, but most barefaced, shining with flowers and flesh; models of all sorts and conditions, some with artistic dresses designed by their favorite

students, some with tarnished gaudery; blondes, brunettes of every nationality — French, English, Greek, Italian, Creoles, Negresses, diversely dowered; frail anæmic women, fervid gypsy-like women, saucily splendid women, soft sleepy women with languorous black eyes, sweet lily-like women, big blowzy women, tall febrile women, little demoniac women, all content to take life as a flash of leaping flame flickering out to an early darkness. And as they danced and laughed and romped and shouted, the fun rose to hysterical frenzy; four masked men bore the queen of the models, sinuous in complete fleshings, niched in an outspread gigantic fan; before it a Druid and a Bacchante danced backward; behind it seethed a vast picturesque procession of women mounted on their cavaliers' shoulders, smoking cigarettes and waving lighted red and green lanterns; at its sides girls pirouetted frantically, foot in mouth; the brazen orchestra clanged—the procession defiled, frolicking, round and round the hall, roaring a students' marching chorus; a wave of hysteria ran through the assembly, mighty, magnetic, compulsive; and Matthew Strang waved his arms and shouted and sang with the best. Joy, joy, joy, this was your true artistic interpretation of life. Away with this modern morbidity! He was one in soul with all the great artists, all the Masters who had had their royal way in life. O royal Eleanor! O rare Eleanor! fit mate for a mighty artist! Then supper came, and he fought for some in the balconies, amid the roar of voices, and the rattle of knives, and the shouts for the maddened waiters, and the indescribable exhalations of food and wine and smoke and hot air and scented flesh. The half-deserted dancing floor was littered with champagne capsules, bits of lanterns, ends of cigarettes, fragments of dresses, spangles, morsels of fur. After supper the frolic grew more intoxicating, the gayety more reckless; sweet demure-looking girls gave themselves to high-kicking and lascivious movement; they obliged with the *danse du ventre;* in a corner a woman turned somersaults from sheer light-heeledness, a bashi-bazouk trundled a hoop through the centre of the room, a band of fifty dancers with joined hands ran amuck among the yelling crowd. Matthew Strang's senses ached with the riot of

color and the rollick of figures and the efflorescence of femininity, and the tohu-bohu of this witches' sabbath. And then a strange ancient thought struck him afresh—the same grotesque thought that after his father's death had weighed upon his childhood: very soon all these scintillating, whirling figures would lie still and cold, frozen in death. They suddenly became nothing but marionettes in a clock-work mechanism destined to run down. And then the girlish form that had hovered mistily in his neighborhood throughout all the tumultuous hours grew clear again, and against this pandemoniac background the inexorable figure of Ruth Hailey rose, simple and virginal, with sweet shy eyes.

When he came back to consciousness of the revellers, they had formed a human amphitheatre, an inner circle lying on the ground, and the next squatting, and the next kneeling, and the next half standing, and the last but one erect, and the last of all surmounted by shouldered girls, and in the centre of this human amphitheatre a beautiful young nude model with ruddy brown hair struck graceful attitudes. The cold blue light of dawn fell through a semicircular window overhead and mingled weirdly with the yellowish electric light, lending a strange, wan, unearthly hue to all these painted, perspiring faces.

The atmosphere seemed unbearably mephitic. He sallied shamefacedly into the street. It was Sunday morning, stainless and fresh and blue. The sunrise brooded over the sleeping gray-etched city in sacred splendor. The sun was like a gigantic bowl of pure gold with a refracted cover separated from it by a rift of cloud. Around it the sky was dappled with lines and splashes and a ring or two of pale sulphur, ending to the south in a narrow gulf of green. And all this loveliness of color was spread on two amorphous islands of amber-gray in an ocean of pale-blue sky, across which a few fleecy clouds sailed swan-like.

He had a perception of the divine, speaking through the silence of beauty. And the world was asleep or at riot.

Ah! this should have been the message of his Art. Each morn the sunrise spoke its flaming word unheard; it was the artist's function to stir the world to the perception of the sub-

limity and poetry that lay all around unheeded; to uplift its eyes to the loveliness of realities, realities solid as rocks, yet beautiful as dreams; visionary and tangible; the great verities of sun and sea and forest, of righteousness and high thinking; beautiful and elemental.

Too late! Too late! Art was over now. Not to his hand had the mission been given; once he had thought to feel the sacred fire in his bosom; but he knew now that the mission was not for him. He had failed.

The great streets stretched under the blue dawn bathed in sacred freshness. The stir of night was passing into the stir of morning. The sleepy yawn of returning revellers was met by the sleepy yawn of early-risen artisans. Two horrible hags of rag-pickers, first astir of Parisians, were resting their baskets on a bench; he heard them rapturously recalling the excellence of the soup they had made from the bones, picked clean by dogs, that they had gathered from the citizens' ash-pans.

Ah, not all the world was gay. He had been surveying only the sparkling bubbles and froth of Paris. Below flowed the sober, orderly, industrious civic life, with its bottom dregs of misery. All the great cities were full of dolorous figures, every by-way and alley swarmed with sickly faces, pale fruits of a congested civilization. He had always kept his eye on those happier than he; now he was reminded of how much more than the man in the street he had drawn in the lottery of the fates. He remembered the saying of a street scavenger he had come across in his days of destitution. "I'm neither hungry nor dry, so what have I to grumble about, mate?" What, indeed, had he, Matthew Strang, to grumble about? There did not seem to be enough happiness to go round. Who was he, to be selected for a special helping? Who was he more than his mate the scavenger, more than any other of the human souls he had met in his diversified career, more than his fellow-lodgers in the slums of Holborn or Halifax, or his fellow-passengers on board *The Enterprise*, or the blind woman who caned chairs in the basement of the house of the Rotherhithe bird-stuffer? Why should he be happy?

It was like a new thought, luminous and arrestive. And then it flashed upon him that all this glitter of gayety that had dazzled his covetous eyes, even if it were not half an illusion, was infinitely subdivided; each person could only have a minute share in the overwhelming total, and even this quantum of joy must be alloyed with the inevitable miseries of the human lot. This was the fallacy that in London, too, had added the sting of envy to his unhappiness; he had lumped together all the pleasure and splendor and happiness of the capital, forgetting that though it could all be lacked by one man, it could not be possessed by one. And to look at life from the outside was childish—it was like reading paragraphs about people in the newspapers. How happy he himself loomed in biographical summaries! Poor Rosina! Poor Aunt Clara! Poor Billy! What happiness for these?

They were foolish, fretful creatures, all of them; in the jargon of the drawing-rooms, bourgeois, vulgar, impossible, too low even for the stigma of "suburban"; but their lives were as important to them as his life to him. Each soul was the centre of its own world. If he could understand them, and they could not understand him, the gain was to him. He was strong, therefore he must supplement their weakness; not because of any ethics or theology, simply because he was stronger. For sheer pity he must give up his life to theirs; sacrifice his Art to their happiness. He must adapt himself to their points of view, since they could not adapt themselves to his; if for Rosina the world turned on the price of beef, he must teach himself to be interested in the price of beef. He had found it easy enough on the day when they had gone a-marketing together at Halifax. He saw her as then, buoyant, youthful, gay, even pretty; was it not he who had made her shrewish, sorrowful, unlovely? How nobly reticent she had been about his neglect of her! Coble had died thinking her ideally happy, boastfully proud of his son-in-law. And after all, there was an excellent side to her economical instincts; she did not long for diamonds and dinner-parties like the wives of other artists; nay, wiser, perhaps, than he, she had known how to content herself with her own station. Even Tarmigan must have approved of her as an artist's wife. Yes, he

must go back to her and his children, not out of any deference to the marriage-tie, but as individual to individuals.

He arrived at his hotel. To his astonishment it was in full illumination; he heard the strains of dance-music from within. He peeped into the magnificent dining-room; it was become a ball-room, and sober couples were waltzing. Women, always women; irreproachable this time; elegant in shimmering silks. The world of fashion was dancing there—dancing on behalf of a charity.

He wavered again; this was the world he was leaving forever, the world of soft things, the world of thought and pleasant speech, the world of art and books and music, the caressing world that praised pictures, and the makers thereof: the world of Eleanor Wyndwood. But the fight was over; in every sense, he told himself, the fight was over. He must go to Eleanor and tell her that happiness was not for either; she would be strong and fine, she would strengthen him in his obedience to the higher voice. But oh—and her face swam up vivid again—would not the very sight of her weaken him, shatter his resolve? And perhaps, too, the sight of him would weaken even her. No, they must never meet again; that was the simplest, the least painful for both.

He gave instructions that he was to leave by the first morning train; he mounted to his room and packed up; then he wrote to Eleanor.

Dearest Eleanor,—Forgive me that I must cause you pain. I can only hope it will prove to have saved you greater pain in the future. But, my dear, I must not pretend it is from any unselfish desire to save you from sacrificing yourself to my happiness, as you in your generous nobility have been ready to do, that I have resolved never to see you again. I am leaving Paris at once. When I tell you the reason I know that it will ease your pain, and that your noble nature will approve and forgive. I am going back to my wife. I have thought it over and see that I have no option. I have been forgetting that in return for her helping me to Art, I vowed to love, cherish, and protect her. If I cannot love her—if I can only love you, if the thought of you will always be like music to me, though I must never see you again in the flesh—I must at least do my best to make her happy. This is not only a farewell to you, it is a farewell to Art. Without you to inspire it, my Art is dead. I retire from the long contest broken-hearted.

Yours so truly, Matthew Strang.

P.S.—I dared not trust myself to come and tell you this. It would have been a useless trial for both of us. You will be happier without me and all the suffering my selfish passion must have brought upon you. Forget me. God bless you.

He descended to the court-yard and dropped the letter into the box. Then he sat outside on his balcony and watched the great gleaming Boulevards as they woke to the new day.

He was too early at the station, and the train tarried. The porters leisurely wheeled in the luggage. Sleepy passengers straggled up, armed with gayly illustrated papers broad with Gallic buffoonery.

Oh, the agony of that last quarter of an hour, when Paris beckoned him with its finger of morning sunlight, when Art cried to him from a thousand happy ateliers, calling him to come back and be happy in the great work he felt he had been about to do at last; when Love shone like a purple haze veiling the world in poetic dream, and sang to him like an angel's voice, and witched him back with the eyes and the hair and the lips of Eleanor Wyndwood!

But the train was going at last, and he must take his seat in his first-class compartment. It was his second defeat, his second farewell to Art, bitterer, crueller by a thousand-fold than the first, when he had sailed home again penniless, broken in soul and body. Then, at least, home was a tender recollection. Now—! And he had been so near the goal of happiness, the cup had been at his very lips. Never to be happy—never, never! The sudden shriek of the engine sounded sardonic. The train moved on, bearing Matthew Strang from all the sweetness and savor of life. In the great ocean of existence wherein men struggle for happiness he had gone down—like his father.

But, like his father, he had gone down wrapped in his flag.

The stage of the world is not adapted for heroic attitudes, unless the curtain be dropped on the instant.

To pass, after a tedious day-long journey, from the vivid boulevards to the gray dreariness of a poor London suburb on a Sunday evening was already a chill to the artistic mind; to find that the wife into whose arms he had come to fall in dramatic

contrition was not only out, but gone to church with Aunt Clara and little Clara, was to be further reminded of the essentially inartistic character of life in general, and of its especial narrowness in church-going districts.

But he stooped down to kiss little Davie, who, by reason of the servant's "Sunday out," had opened the door and explained these things to him. He saw that the child had a little wooden mannikin in his hand, and was sucking it.

"Don't suck that, Davie," he said.

"There ain't no paint to spoil," Davie urged, gravely. "It's all gone."

Matthew carried both the little men down-stairs on his shoulder. In the kitchen he found Billy moping by the fire—profiting by the absence of the servant to enjoy the only fire Rosina's economy permitted at this season of the year—but sunk so deep in a black reverie that he did not raise his head at the unwonted footsteps.

A wave of protective love, almost paternal, flooded Matthew's soul; he laid his hand on poor Billy's head as in benediction. Nevermore would they be parted, nevermore.

"Billy," he said, softly.

The young man started violently, and looked up.

"I've come back, Billy," he said, tenderly.

"So I see," replied Billy, ungraciously.

He was stung to the quick, but he controlled his pain; he saw this was part of his atonement.

"I've come to make it up with Rosina. I'm not going away again," he went on gently, his hand on Billy's shoulder.

"And what's the use of that?" Billy snapped. "Even if she makes it up with you, she'll break out again in a few days. I know her."

He set down the child with a sigh, and drew a chair to his brother's side. Davie climbed trustfully on his knee. The kettle was singing, and a plump gray cat purred in the fender.

"Besides," Billy went on, "you've always said you couldn't live here—it was necessary to live at your studio."

"I know; but I am giving up the studio."

Billy turned whiter than usual.

"What's happened?" he cried in alarm.

"Nothing in particular."

"Then I suppose you are going to turn me out of my workroom?"

"No, no, Billy. I am giving up painting altogether."

Billy's eyes dilated in horror, as on the night when his mother had dragged him out of bed to trudge the frozen fields.

"Are you mad?" he gasped.

Something of his awe sent a shiver through his brother.

"Perhaps I am," said Matthew.

He fell silent.

Billy regarded him furtively. The minutes dragged on. Matthew looked at his watch—getting on for seven. Eleanor Wyndwood would have been dressing for him—he saw her matchless loveliness. Another few minutes, and his kisses would have been on her lips—those lips that had lain on his in what was already an enchanted, hazy dream rather than a waking memory.

"Perhaps I *am* mad," he muttered again, as he sat waiting for Rosina instead. And then he caught sight of the little figure Davie was sucking, and began to laugh boisterously.

Billy was terrified.

"You can have the studio back if you like," he said, soothingly; the cripple's tones became protective in their turn. "I can write anywhere—and, after all, what's the use of my writing?—nobody will take what I write."

"I can write kisses," interposed Davie, looking up proudly.

"What does he mean, Billy?" said Matthew.

"Oh, he used to put crosses at the end of the letter when Rosina wrote to poor old Coble — kisses to his grandfather, you know."

"He's a angel now," said Davie, gravely.

"What's that you're sucking?" Billy responded, sternly. "You know you mustn't."

He took it away, and Davie set up a howl till pacified by a penny.

"It's an image of a preacher, Matt," Billy explained. "I forget his name. He died last year—Rosina used to go and

hear him. She said he gave her great comfort. These images are sold in thousands. What a ludicrous thing popular religion is!"

Matthew laughed, but there was a tear for Rosina in the laughter.

"By-the-way," he said, suddenly, "did old Coble leave her any money?"

"Yes—but a few thousand dollars was all there was when his estate was wound up. He couldn't have expected to crack up, for he made no provision whatever for Aunt Clara."

"Then Rosina is keeping her?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"How does she reconcile that with her economy?" he thought, with an added throb of tenderness. The kettle sang on; the cat purred; he had a flash of hope—he might grow to love her yet. But he thought of Eleanor Wyndwood, and the hope died. They would have been on their way now to their restaurant—sitting close together, driving through the flashing streets. Oh, was he not mad to be here?

"What are you doing all alone?" he thought. "My love, my first love and my last, you who believed in me, who were ready to sacrifice yourself to me?"

"Did you go to see Ruth Hailey?" asked Billy, suddenly.

Eleanor's face vanished. He put his hand to his breast-pocket, and drew out the portrait with the sweet, shy eyes.

"Yes," he said, tremulously, "and she gave me this."

Billy took the photograph and kissed it.

"God bless you!" he said.

Davie pricked up his ears.

"You're not in love with her?" Matthew asked, lightly, with a sudden apprehension.

"I?—I know better than to be in love with any woman," said Billy, sadly, as he returned the portrait. "Only in my stories can I love and be loved."

"It was she who sent us that mysterious money," said Matthew, and told him the story. Billy listened in surprise and emotion.

"God bless you, Ruth!" he said again.

"What is that God?" interrupted Davie.

The brothers looked at each other, embarrassed.

"Ask mummy; she'll tell you," said Matthew, at last.

"Mummy did tell me, but I can't 'derstand." He sat there wondering. "When does God sleep?"

The sudden blare and boom of a Salvationist procession saved reply. The blatant clangor passed, died. They waited for Rosina.

Presently they heard the returning church party descending into the area, so as not to soil the white upper-steps. He had kissed her before she was aware of his presence, as she stepped across the kitchen threshold, red-edged prayer-book in hand. After that her sullenness was only half-hearted. He said he had come to supper. By the time they had sat down to it a reconciliation had been patched up. Warned by Billy's reception of his determination, he did not even break it to her yet. Thus tamely passed off the great renunciation scene—the crisis of his life—like everything else in his life, unlike what he had imagined beforehand. Rosina did not even understand what this home-coming meant to him. He pleaded that Davie, who did not want to go to sleep, should be allowed to stay up to supper, but this request was not granted.

"Mummy, when does God go to sleep?" the persistent Davie remembered to ask as she was leading him from the room.

"God never sleeps," replied Rosina, sternly, and haled him to bed.

Matthew pondered the immense saying, so glibly spoken, as he waited for her to return. "Aunt Clara," pouch-eyed and wan, her head nodding queerly with excitement at the great man's presence, was laying the supper in the warm kitchen, where the servant would not resume possession till ten; little Clara was at her task of Bible reading. Billy drowsed on his chair, exhausted. The fire glowed red; the cat was still stretched in the warmth. Something in the scene thrilled him with a sense of restful kinship with it, half sweet, half sad; a sense of being more really at home than in delicate drawing-rooms; the old homely kitchen far away on the borders of the

forest sent out subtle links, binding his childhood to the manhood that had come at last.

This half-and-half-ness was typical of the new life which began that night, and which on the morrow was sealed and consecrated by the characteristically self-deceptive message from Eleanor: "You are right. We have chosen the highest." It was a life full of petty pricks and every-day worries. But if it was not so grandiosely heroic as he had intended, neither was the consequence to his Art as he had foreseen.

He has not given up Art. Neither Rosina nor Billy would permit that folly, and Eleanor's brief letter had a postscript of inspiring protest. He had meant to sacrifice Art and Happiness, but only the latter sacrifice was accepted. For unhappiness drove him back to his studio—where the "Angelus" hung now like an inspiration. From the glooms and trials of the daily routine in this prosaic home, with its faithful but narrow-souled mistress, who knew not what was passing in her husband's mind, nor at what cost he had made her happy, and who would not even agree to live in some beautiful country spot which would have softened life for him — from this depressing household, with its unsprightly children, its cheerless pensioner, its querulous cripple resenting the very hand that fed him, he escaped to the little whitewashed studio to find in his Art oblivion of the burden of life.

And now, at last, his true life-work was begun. Removed from the sapping cynicism of the Club conscience, from the drought of drawing-room disbelief, from the miasma of fashionable conversation, from the confusing cackle of critics; saved from the intrigue with Mrs. Wyndwood, that would have distracted his soul and imposed an extra need for money-making; withdrawn from the feverish rush of fashion and the enervating consumption of superfluous food and drink; exempted from keeping up a luxurious position purchased by scamped, soulless pictures; able to work without the whims of sitters or patrons, without regard to prices—for Rosina's income, augmented by her very considerable hoardings and by his balance, supplemented by the proceeds of the sale of his studio effects and

"SOMETHING IN THE SCENE THRILLED HIM WITH A SENSE OF RESTFUL KINSHIP"

ancient pictures, the whole doubled by Rosina's economic administration, was amply sufficient for every rational need—Matthew Strang began at last, without underthought of anything but Art, in this homely environment to which his soul was native, to express his own inmost individuality, to produce faithfully and finely the work it was in him to do.

Solitary, silent, sorrowful, strong; not chattering about his ideas and his aims, indifferent to fame or the voice of posterity, striving for self-approbation and rarely obtaining it, touching and retouching, breaking the rules of the schools in obedience to his own genius, he toiled on in his humble studio, seeking the highest, with no man and no woman to inspire, encourage, or praise. He had been saved from Love and Happiness, and sent back into sympathy with all that works and suffers. And thus the note that had trembled faintly and then died out in his work was struck strong and sure at last—the note of soul. To his accurate science and his genius for the decorative, which are two of the factors of great Art, was now added the spiritual poetry which is the last and rarest. For he was master of his soul at last.

He had absorbed life sufficiently — he had toiled and hungered; he had feasted and made merry; he had sorrowed and endured; he had sinned and suffered; he had known the lust of life and the pride of the eye; he had known Love—the love of the soul and the love of the senses; he had known the heart-ache of baffled ambition and the dust and ashes of achievement. What he had wanted he had not got; by the time he had got it he had not wanted it; whatever he had set out to do he had not done, and whatever he had done he had not foreseen. And out of all this travail of the soul was born his Art—strong, austere, simple.

In the five or six years since he died to the world he has finished as many big pictures, and has made studies for others, besides a host of minor things. He has not exhibited any of the larger pictures in the Academy; three have been presented quietly to provincial and suburban galleries where the People comes. Only one with some of the smaller things has been sold for money, and this but to appease Rosina; it was one more

sacrifice of his individuality to hers. It is true there are expenses for models and materials, and he has now two more children, but it jars upon him to ask money for work that expresses and conceals the tragic secrets of his inmost being. Nor does he care to have his pictures shut away amid the other furniture of luxurious mansions. Still, he has learned enough to know that life cannot be lived ideally. And, moreover, the event has taught him again the contrariety of life; for his eccentricity, leaking out slowly, has enhanced the fame to which he is indifferent, and, aided by a legend of mysterious saturnine seclusion, has raised his market value to such a point that he need only sell an occasional picture. One dealer in particular is anxious to give him his own price for a picture. Matthew Strang will probably part with one to him some day, but he does not know that the dealer is acting for Lady Thornton, the wealthy and celebrated society leader and convert, though he knows and is glad that Eleanor Wyndwood found both happiness and spiritual peace when, a few months after her friend Olive Regan's marriage to Herbert Strang, that ever-charming and impressionable lady was led to the altar by the handsome and brilliant Sir Gilbert Thornton, and went over with him to Roman Catholicism. With the same earnestness with which she had passed from her native orthodoxy to the Socialism of Gerard Brode, and thence to the spirituality of Dolkovitch, she had slid by a natural transition from the sensuous art atmosphere of Matthew Strang's world into the sensuous spirituality of Catholicism as soon as his influence had been replaced by the ascendency of another male mind. He was not asked to the wedding, and the invitation to Olive's, reaching him in the days when the first darkness of isolation was upon him, he had left unanswered.

And just as he has given his Art freely to the world, so, under the inspiration of Tarmigan's memory, he gives his services freely at Grainger's and other humble art-schools as encourager of every talent that aspires under discouragement; teaching it to be itself and nothing else, for the artist gives to the world and is not asked for, creating the taste he satisfies, and Art is not Truth nor Beauty, but a revelation of beautiful truth through the individual vision. It is the artist's reaction to the stimulus of his universe,

whether his universe be our common world seen for itself or through antecedent art, or a private world of inward vision: for while the philosophers are quarrelling about abstract truth, the artist answers Pilate's question through his own personality. The beauty which Matthew Strang's art reveals, though he experiments in many styles, with unequal results, is mainly tragic. For others the gay, the flippant, the bright—let those from whose temperament these things flow interpret the joyousness and buoyancy and airy grace of existence. For others the empty experimentation in line and color. It is all Art—in the house of Art are many mansions. He has come to the last of the three stages of so many artists, who pass from the fever to do everything, through a period of intolerance for all they cannot do, into a genial acceptance of the good in all schools. But, unassuming as he has always been, he is yet sometimes shaken by righteous indignation when he sees tawdry art—art that is the response to the stimulus of no universe but the artificial studio-universe of models and posings and stage-properties—enthroned and fêted at the banquet of life; and sometimes an unguarded word flashes out before his pupils, but he always repents of his railings, feeling it is his to work, not to judge; to do the one simple thing that his hand findeth to do.

One of his pictures is of a woman looking out to sea with hopeless eyes; there is a mocking glory of sunset in the sky. This is called "The Pain of the World." The title was due to Olive's exclamation that night in Devonshire. The figure is his mother's, come back to him in his own solitude—the image of her standing thus in the asylum at Halifax could not be effaced from his soul; it had to find expression in his Art.

As he worked at it, with the brutal aloofness of the artist, studying lights and shadows, values and effects, gradations and tones, he wondered whether the artist were a cold-blooded monster, or a divinely appointed alchemist sent to transmute the dross of the world's pain to the gold of Art for the world's pleasure; a magician to cover up the rawness of life, as kindly Nature covers up the naked earth with grass, or throws the purple light of dream over all that is dead—over the centuries that are past or our youth that is gone; a Redeemer, whose beautiful percep-

tion of pathos and tragedy robs the grave of its victory, and plucks Death of its sting, so that no man suffereth or travaileth without contributing to the raw stuff of life of which Art is woven by the souls dowered with the pangs and privileges of Over-Consciousness. Each man, it sometimes seemed to him, dimly, had to pay so much in sorrow and pain; and in return for that he drew from the common human fund the comprehension of life and the consolation of Art, new sympathies and new delights, music and books and pictures, that only lived through the rich variety of human destinies; mystic atmospheres and minor scales, meaningless to souls that had not suffered or inherited the capacity to suffer. Some—generally the stupid—paid little in pain and sorrow; and some—as in his own case—much. But so long as the account showed a balance to the general good, it was not for the soul that was sacrificed to complain. It was, perhaps, even a privilege to subserve the common good. Life was so arranged that virtue could not be sure of personal reward, and this uncertainty was just what made virtue possible. Under no other scheme of things could the soul enjoy the privilege of virtue. To have suffered, as he himself had done, by the institution of marriage, both as child and husband; to have been a victim to the general laws which safeguard human society; to have been cut in two by the flaming swords of the cherubim, which turn every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life—all this did not, he thought, give him the right to blaspheme existence. And the artist at least extracted a soul of good from all things evil.

Some such reflections — not clear, but all confused and blurred, for he was no syllogism-building philosopher, but an artist whose profoundest thought sprang always from the concrete image before him—came to him again when he was working at his famous picture "The Persecutors," inspired by an episode in Billy's life, though Billy does not know. It is simply children tormenting an old man. The old man is one of the world's wrecks; the children know not what they do. But the pathos of the picture is overwhelming; it purifies by pity and terror. This is the profit to the world of Billy's life.

Matthew Strang knows, with the same secret assurance that sent him out to fight, and strengthened him in the long struggle, that this picture will live, that the gods have answered his boyish prayer for immortality. But at moments when Billy is moping or in pain, or when the artist foresees the gabble of magazines and drawing-rooms about his work, the chatter of fashionable parrots, and the analysis of his "second manner" by glib, comfortable critics, he wonders whether the picture or the immortality is worth the price.

But, stronger than those driven by their Over-Consciousness to express in artistic shapes the futility of life, he does not dwell eternally on the tears of things; and his picture simply entitled "A Woman" is perhaps his masterpiece. For when he painted it that sunrise in Paris was still vivid to him, and the light in Ruth Hailey's eyes, and that fire of love in Eleanor Wyndwood's; these things were in the eternal order, too, as truly as the ugliness and the sordid realities. The simplest human life was packed with marvels of sensation and emotion, haloed with dreams and divine illusions. To have been a child, to have sung and danced, to have eaten and played, to have seen woods and waters, to have grown to youth and to manhood, to have dreamed and aspired, to have labored and hoped—all this happiness had been his while he was looking for happiness, just as Art had been his in Nova Scotia, while he had been struggling to get to it in England.

And so to-day he yearns to paint the poetry of the Real—not with the false romantic glamour which had witched his youth, though even his youth had had a hankering after the Real, just as his maturity retains a love for the mystic. That gilded unreality to which his Art would have gravitated, had he found happiness with the sentimental Eleanor in her atmosphere of fashion, will be replaced by the beauty that even when mystic is based on Truth. He needed no woman's inspiration, nor the stimulus of cultured cliques. Alone he faces the realities of life and death without intervening veils of charming illusion, no longer craving to filter the honest sunlight through stained cathedral windows or to tarnish the simplicity of the grave with monumental angels. Aspiring now to paint London, he wanders

through the gray streets, as in his days of hunger, but now the grotesque figures no longer seem outside the realm of serious Art, or mere picturesque arrangements of line and color. To his purged vision, that still lacks humor, they touch the mysteries and the infinities, passing and disappearing like ghosts on a planet of dream: solitude has brought him a sense of the universal life from which they flow, and he fancies the function of Art should be to show the whole in every part, the universal through the particular. And so he longs to paint the beauty that lies unseen of grosser eyes, the poetry of mean streets and every-day figures, to enrich and hallow life by revealing some sweep of a great principle that purifies and atones.

In "The Old Maid" he has painted the portrait of "Aunt Clara" with Davie on her knee, revealing the wistful, imprisoned, maternal instinct he detected one day in her sunken eyes as she fondled his little Davie. What makes this presentation of ugliness Art is not merely the breathing brush-work, but the beauty of his own pity which the artist has added to the Nature he copied. With the falsely aristocratic in Art or life he has lost sympathy: to him to be honest and faithful is to belong to the only aristocracy in the world—and the smallest. Sometimes he dreams of some great Common Art—for all men, like the sky and the air, which should somehow soften life for all. And dreaming thus he somewhat frets against the many limitations of his own Art—as once in his callow boyhood when he set out to write that dime novel—and against its lapsed influence in modern life, wishing rather he had been a great poet or a great musician. Only music and poetry, he feared while toiling at the "Old Maid," could express and inspire modern life; the impulse that had raised the cathedral had been transformed into the impulse that built the grand hotel, fitted throughout with electrical conveniences; in the visible arts landscape and portraiture alone seemed to find response from the modern mind, the one by its revelation of the beauty of the world, the other by its increasing subtlety of psychological insight. Painting had begun with religion, religion had led to technique, then religion had drifted away from painting, and then technique had become a religion. But technique ought not to be thought of separately except by

the student; to the artist the spiritual and the material came as one conception, as metre comes with the poet's thought. The spirit must be brought back to painting—this modern accuracy of tones and forms was but the channel for it. But it could no longer be conveyed through the simple images of a popular creed to which all men vibrated: to-day there was no such common chord for the artist to touch. Even this picture of "The Old Maid" might be unintelligible without its title, and risked denunciation as literary. And the greatest picture could be seen by but few.

But repining is useless; there is only one thing he can do, and he must do it—a small thing in the span of the cosmos and the sweep of the ages, but to be done ere he goes down to the kindred dust. But before death comes he has doubtless other things to suffer—all these spiritual agonies have seared the body in which early privations and sickness had already left the seeds of premature infirmity. His children are growing up, too, bringing new fears and problems.

And yet his life is not all unhappy—work is his anodyne, and there is an inner peace in the daily pain, because it is the pain that his soul has chosen, in willing slavery to its own yoke.

But life is too long for ideals; the unending procession of the days depresses the finest enthusiasm. Sometimes when the domestic horizon is dark, or when his body is racked with pain, he rebels against the rôle thrust upon him in the world's workshop, and against the fate that mocked at his free-will, and made of him a voluntary instrument for the happiness of Rosina and Herbert, turning his every action to undreamed-of issues; and then he longs for the life that he had found so hollow, the life of gay talk, and rustling dresses, and wine, and woman, and song. And in such moments as these—when the natural human instinct for happiness, yearning sunward, breaks through all the strata of laborious philosophy and experience—he remembers that men call him "The Master," and then he seems to hear the sardonic laughter of Mad Peggy, as he asks himself what Master he has followed in his sacrifice, or what Master, working imperturbably, moulds human life at his ironic, inscrutable will.

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